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THE
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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEB. 1988
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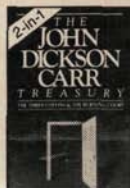
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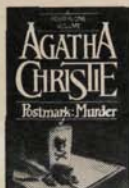
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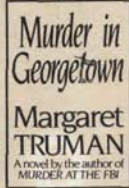
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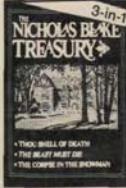
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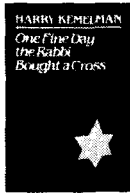
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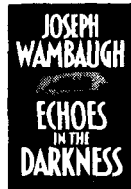
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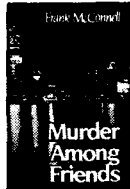
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a **NEW Jonas Pickett** story by

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Superintendent Queen remembered that there was something in Station Orders about Dr. Rainey. There had been instructions that the man whose beat passed the doctor's house should keep an eye open for possible intruders. This particular item dated from before Queen's arrival. No reason was given for it . . .

THE BIRD OF DAWNING

by **MICHAEL GILBERT**

On the morning of Tuesday, July fourteenth, Fred, the jobbing gardener, arrived at old Dr. Rainey's front gate at nine o'clock precisely. One of the things people liked about Fred and which made them willing to pay him three pounds an hour for an eight-hour day was that he really did work for eight hours. And, as a result, he never lacked employment. His Mondays and Tuesdays belonged to Dr. Rainey, Wednesdays and Thursdays to Mr. and Mrs. McClachan, and Fridays and Saturdays to Sabrina Mountjoy, who had taken him over when she bought Captain Horrocks' house and glad to do so. Being a partner in Jonas Pickett's legal practice was, she maintained, a full-time job.

Fred hobbled round the house and down to his private kingdom, which was the potting shed at the bottom of the garden. His limp was the result of war service. Apart from this, despite his seventy years, his frugal habits and open-air life had preserved his health and strength marvelously.

"Looks more like fifty than seventy," Mrs. McClachan often remarked to her husband. "And strong as a horse." Her husband, who was in fact fifty and looked more, agreed with her rather resentfully. He played a lot of golf, but it seemed to do nothing for his waistline.

© 1987 by Michael Gilbert.

Fred set to work without delay. There was a lot to do in a vegetable garden at that time of year. The asparagus was finished and the runner beans were to come, but the French beans, the peas, and the Jerusalem artichokes were all flourishing and the new potatoes, carrots, and little globe turnips were in the course of being dug up and stored for the winter.

For the moment, however, they would have to wait. There was a more important job in hand. There was a south-facing bed under the brick wall at the foot of the garden. Fred had promised the doctor he would try to grow tomato plants there, but the earth would need careful cleaning first.

He took down the spade and fork that were hanging in the shed among the rows of flowerpots, trays of dried bulbs, sacks of compost and silver sand, tins of weedkiller, and twists of bast. He rubbed them over with a piece of sacking. This was a ritual gesture. Like all his tools, they were spotless. Then he attacked the new bed, trenching it deeply and methodically, depositing the roots and other growths which he extracted on the bonfire he had lit the day before and which was still smoldering nicely.

At eleven o'clock, he suspended work, left fork and spade sticking in the earth, and made his way up to the back of the house. This was the accepted first break. The procedure varied. Mrs. McClachan would make him a cup of tea. Sabrina Mountjoy left the back door open and a tin of instant coffee with milk and sugar on the table. Dr. Rainey, if he was in the house, would make the coffee for both of them, using real beans. He was finicky about the kitchen, did a lot of his own cooking, and, by all accounts, did it very well.

The kitchen door was locked. Fred rapped once or twice on the kitchen window without producing any reaction, then made his way round to the front of the house. The front door was fast, too. Fred stood for a few seconds, scratching his head. Then he touched the button of the bell and heard it sounding inside the house. He had never used the front door. Previously his entry had always been through the kitchen.

After waiting for a long minute, he pressed the button again, keeping it pressed. When this produced no result, he went down the path and out into the road. There was a telephone booth at the corner.

The sergeant on duty at Shackleton Police Station listened impatiently to Fred's rambling comments and put the call through to

Superintendent Queen. Fred then had to say it all over again, but here he found a more attentive listener.

Queen remembered that there was something in Station Orders about Dr. Rainey. There had been instructions that the man whose beat passed the doctor's house should keep an eye open for possible intruders. This particular item dated from before Queen's arrival. No reason was given for it. He told Fred to get back to work and went along the passage to the office of Chief Superintendent Whaley, head of the Shackleton Force.

Whaley said, "Yes, I remember that going into orders. In fact, I fancy I put it in myself. It was about four years ago when we heard about the precautions the doctor was taking. He'd had a very sophisticated alarm system put into his house. We knew about it because it was linked to this station."

"The normal sort of system?"

"No. This was security *and* alarm. A firm in Brighton did the job. Lockfast, or some such name. If the doctor's died in the house, you'll need their help to get inside."

Nearly an hour later, after doing some telephoning, Queen was standing outside Dr. Rainey's front door. There were two men with him—Mr. Cowdray from Lockfast Home Protection Services and Mr. Terriss from the Shackleton office of the S.E. Electricity Board.

"It was a lovely job," said Mr. Cowdray, "if I say it myself. Builders' work and all. First we had to replace most of the windows."

Queen had noticed this. It was a low, two-story house and the windows on both floors were the same. Steel frames with small square openings.

"They're all locked, on the same circuit as the doors. You could break a pane of glass and put your hand through, but that wouldn't get you much farther, as you couldn't open the window. If you tried to force the window lock, you'd get a nasty electric shock and nothing much else."

"So how do we get in?" said Mr. Terriss.

"You let us in. By turning off the electricity. There's a control box in the road outside that services this house, along with the other three houses on that side of the road. We won't need it off for more than a minute."

Mr. Terriss agreed this was feasible. He had brought the necessary equipment in his car. Having opened the control box, he worked for some time inside it. When he stood up and raised one hand, Mr.

Cowdray, who had a key ready, slid it into the lock and opened the door. They stepped into the hall, which was dimly lit and silent as a church on a weekday.

"Doctor Rainey!" said Queen. He had intended to shout, but the atmosphere was so oppressive it came out as a strangled croak. He called again, louder, but without any real expectation now of being answered.

On the left of the hall was the sitting room. Queen opened the door and looked in. It was empty. Behind that and opening out of it, the doctor's study. Also empty. On the other side of the passage was the dining room. Here they found Dr. Rainey, sitting in the chair at the head of the table. His head had fallen forward onto his hands.

Queen raised the head gently. It was clear that Dr. Rainey was dead. Queen, who had seen many dead men, was startled by the look on his face. It was as though he had seen death coming and had hated it more than he had feared it.

While the police surgeon and the photographers and fingerprint men were doing their work—"Treat it as a murder until we're sure it wasn't," said Whaley—Queen was talking to Mr. Cowdray. He said, "I understand this was a security *and* an alarm system. How does it work?"

"Very simple. Very effective. That's the control." Cowdray pointed to a small box of grey-painted steel in the cupboard under the stairs. There was a single keyhole in the front of it. "If you're going out, turn the key once. That sets a normal alarm, which rings in your police station if anyone tampers with the doors or windows whilst you're away. Okay?"

Queen nodded. Several of the larger houses had that arrangement. It was a standing source of irritation, as careless householders forgot that the alarm had been activated and set it off by mistake. But he could never remember an alarm from Dr. Rainey.

"Last thing at night, you turn the key twice. That's what's been done here. That locks the doors and all the windows electrically. Then you can go to bed and sleep sound. Only drawback, you can't have your bedroom window open. The doctor had an air-conditioner he used in summer."

Queen thought about it. He said, "I take it the electrical locking only operates if all the windows and doors are shut. Suppose you'd left one open by mistake?"

"The machine would tell you. It'd go on bleeping until you shut it."

"Then what you're saying," said Queen thoughtfully, "is that once this thing was functioning, no one could get in from outside."

"Only by cutting off the electricity and, as you saw, that needed special equipment."

Queen put all this in his report, which Chief Superintendent Whaley read, together with Dr. Smallhorn's conclusions, which were that Dr. Rainey had died of renal failure. "That's not uncommon with an elderly person," the report said. "The liver and kidneys get tired and stop functioning. As a matter of fact, I suspected that something like that might happen when he came to see me last month."

"That's that, then," said Whaley.

So the death of Dr. Rainey was certified as being due to natural causes, the Coroner was not troubled, and the funeral was conducted a week later in St. Michael's Church by the new young incumbent.

It was a quiet affair. Many of Dr. Rainey's patients had predeceased him. Some of the town notables thought it respectful to attend. Among them were Jock Lovibond, the chairman of the Borough Council, and Jonas Pickett, who had a special reason for being there. After the interment, he had a word with Lovibond.

"I'm having a copy of his will made for you," he said. "In a sense, you're his residuary legatee."

"How could I be? I hardly knew the man."

"It comes to you *ex officio*. Having no near relatives, he decided to leave his whole estate to the chairman of the Borough Council, to be expended on such charitable and useful objects for the locality as he might select. When I've paid the debts—there weren't many—and the funeral expenses and duties, there should be around fifty thousand pounds left."

"Which I can spend on anything for the borough that I like?"

"You'll have to be careful that it's charitable. However, charity covers quite a wide field. Education, religion, the relief of poverty."

"I call it very handsome. I think we ought to put up some sort of memorial tablet in the church, don't you?"

"I think that would be most appropriate," said Jonas.

Every police station keeps, among its many other records, a book known as the Occurrences Book. Into it go reports of anything out of the way a policeman may have observed on his patrol. It is not

an exciting work. Flights of fancy are discouraged. It deals with facts. "At 3:00 this morning Major X left his house driving his Ford Corsair." No doubt there were half a dozen good reasons for Major X's early departure. A long journey to the Midlands? Sensible to use the roads when they were empty. An early plane to catch at Heathrow? Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the entry led to nothing. On the hundredth occasion, it proved to be the one essential item of information needed to tie up a case.

All senior officers studied the book from time to time. Superintendent Queen was doing so about a fortnight after Dr. Rainey's funeral. He was looking for scraps of information which might enable them to identify a persistent "Peeping Tom" who had been upsetting the local swains. Such people might not be breaking the law, but their activities, as he knew, could lead to all sorts of trouble.

It was while he was turning the pages that he came across the entry: July 14th, 6 A.M. P.C. Trotter, returning past the front of No. 8 Princes Road, observed a man moving off down the little lane at the side of the house. Since the man did not appear to be doing anything illegal, P.C. Trotter had not pursued him. He had simply made a note in the Occurrences Book. Princes Road was a high-cost development of eight well-spaced houses, four on each side of the road. No. 8 was the end house on the north side. It was Dr. Rainey's house.

Queen noted the significance of the date and place and sent for P.C. Trotter. It was clear that the constable had attached very little importance to the incident. As soon as he had come off duty he had gone to bed, and by the time he had returned to the station in the afternoon the unexciting death of Dr. Rainey was already fading into past history. Now it seemed that the top brass was interested and he had to prod his memory.

He said, "He was too far away to pick up any detail. I'm sure it was a man, not a woman. Chances are I wouldn't have noticed anything at all if it hadn't been for the bird."

"Bird?" Mysterious female? Sex angle?

No, Trotter was not using the word to describe an attractive young lady. He meant the feathered sort.

"At least, I thought it might be a bird. Then I thought, no, it couldn't be. It was what you might call mechanical."

"Like a cuckoo clock?"

"That sort of thing. Except it wasn't going 'cuckoo'—it was more sort of chirruping. High-pitched chirruping."

"And it seemed to come from Number Eight?"

"Thereabouts. It didn't go on all that long. It had stopped by the time I got up there."

"How far away were you when you first heard it?"

"I was almost at the corner."

"Then it can't have gone on for more than a few seconds."

"That's right." Trotter was beginning to be sorry he'd ever mentioned it. If the bird story got out, he was going to have his leg pulled, that was for sure.

"You did know, I take it, that there was a standing instruction to patrolling officers to keep an eye on that particular house."

Trotter had to admit that he had not known this, or if he had known it he'd forgotten it. Since that particular entry was four years old, Queen found it difficult to blame him much. He dismissed him with a stern admonition to reread and memorize *all* standing orders.

When Trotter had departed, Queen sat for some time thinking about his subordinate. If he had been writing a confidential report on Trotter, he would have described him as sound—not clever, not imaginative, but totally reliable. And there *was* a possible explanation of what he had heard; a high-pitched, mechanical chirrup. If the explanation was true, it led to consequences so dark and difficult that he hesitated to think them through. He decided that the first thing was to have a word with the Chief Superintendent.

Whaley heard him out, grunted, and said, "What do you propose to do about it?"

"I think, sir, the best way to settle it would be to carry out an experiment."

He explained what he had in mind. "The house has just been put up for sale. We could get the keys from the agents and station a reliable man—Sergeant Fox, I suggest—inside the house to do what was necessary."

"It will have to be done when there's a minimum of noise outside."

"I thought six A.M. would be the logical time. Then we should get an exact repeat."

"Would you like me to be there, too?"

"Very much," said Queen, slightly surprised.

"I only hope it isn't pouring with rain."

Happily, it was a fine, still August morning when Whaley, Queen, and Constable Trotter met at the corner of Princes Road. Trotter

seemed a little overawed by the company. He had no idea what was expected of him.

Queen, who had his eye on his watch, said, "Place yourself at the end of the road and when I tell you to start, walk, at your normal pace, down the road."

A reconstruction of the crime? wondered Trotter. It seemed a bit pointless.

"Start," said Queen.

Trotter said, "Christ," and turned pale. He knew that the house was empty—and now he heard, coming from it, exactly the sound he had heard before. Was the spirit of Doctor Rainey haunting his old residence?

The noise stopped.

"Keep going!" shouted Queen urgently.

Trotter paced forward, hardly daring to contemplate what was going to happen next. He reached the end of the lane that ran between the doctor's house and the next one and his astonishment escalated when he observed a figure disappearing down the path. He was about to pursue it when Queen stopped him. "All right!" he said.

"All right," said Whaley grimly. And to a still-shaken Trotter: "I take it you can confirm that that was the noise you heard?"

"I certainly can, sir," said Trotter. "But who—?"

"The man you saw was Sergeant Fox. He was helping us. I've warned him, and I'm warning you, not a word about this to anyone. You understand?"

"Yes, sir." He understood nothing. But that was a direct order and could be obeyed.

Later that morning, Queen and Whaley faced each other in Whaley's office. Neither of them looked happy.

Whaley said, "Experiment successful. What does it mean?"

"It can only mean one thing, sir. There was another man inside the house. When the electric lock is on, a door or a window can be opened *from the inside*. While it's open, the apparatus gives a warning bleep. That was the noise Trotter heard."

"And once the door was shut again, the noise would stop?"

"Exactly. The man would slam it shut behind him and nip off, down the garden path and into the lane. The timing was right for that, too."

They thought about it, and the more they thought the less they liked it.

"By the way," said Queen, "I meant to ask you. That order about keeping an eye on the doctor's house. What was the reason for it?"

"I seem to remember that he'd had some sort of threat. He took it seriously enough to fortify his house, so we took it a bit seriously, too."

Queen said, "If someone did kill him, it must have been by poison. Yet Dr. Smallhorn seemed satisfied that death was due to natural causes."

"Dr. Smallhorn's an old woman," said Whaley. "He'd give any diagnosis that saved him trouble. I didn't question it at the time because there seemed no reason to do so. Now I wouldn't rely on it any more than when he said my daughter was suffering from heat rash and it turned out to be measles."

"So," said Queen, "there's only one way to settle it."

"Right. An exhumation order. I don't like it, but I can't see any way round it."

"We shall need the agreement of the next of kin, which means going to Jonas Pickett."

Whaley said, "Yes." He did not say it with great enthusiasm. There had been passages in his earlier dealings with that lawyer which he remembered with distaste. However, time had smoothed things over and there had been at least one occasion on which Jonas had proved decidedly helpful to the police.

"All right," he said. "He's by way of being a friend of yours, isn't he? You have a word with him."

"I'm Dr. Rainey's sole executor," said Jonas. "I didn't like the idea, but he insisted. As soon as I've got the estate wound up, I shall hand over to Jock Lovibond. He'll have to appoint trustees to help him with the charitable part."

"But for the moment," said Queen, "you're in charge of everything?"

"Correct."

"And you've got all his papers?"

"I've got what there was. There wasn't a lot."

"I wondered if they might have given us a lead about his next of kin."

Queen, who had considerable confidence in Jonas's professional reticence, had explained what they had in mind.

"It's often been my job to go through the papers of a dead person," said Jonas, "but I can't remember any case in which they were so

uninformative. He seems to have destroyed his professional records when he retired. Sensible thing for a doctor to do, perhaps. Then there are the sort of household records you'd expect. But there isn't a single paper that's more than four years old. No birth certificate. And—this really is odd—no passport."

"Might it be at the bank?"

"The bank has the deeds of this house and some share certificates. No personal papers at all. And when he left his previous solicitors, a Portsmouth firm, and came to me—that was shortly after I got here—he seems to have removed his papers from them and destroyed the lot."

Queen said, "It looks as though something happened four years ago that scared him. It was then that he asked for police protection and fortified his house."

"I think that's right," said Jonas. "He got a jolt of some sort."

"But it doesn't help us much."

"There's one point in his papers which might give us a lead. I explained to him that his will could only be proved in this country if we could establish that his domicile was English. Fortunately he was able to make a clear statement about that, as you'll see."

He pushed a copy of the will across to Queen, who read: "'I, Claud Rainey, doctor of medicine, declare that I am a domiciled and naturalized Englishman.'" He looked at Jonas.

"The point is that this declaration does suggest two lines of enquiry. As he's a doctor, there must be some record of his qualification. The B.M.A. would be the people to ask. I think you'd have to do that. They wouldn't open up to me. On the other hand, I have got an old friend in the Home Office. He might be able to tell me about the naturalization. Also, perhaps, it would help if I had a word with the gardener. He works on Fridays and Saturdays for my partner, so it'd be easy to keep it informal. He'd be more unbuttoned with me than with you."

The truth of the matter was that Jonas enjoyed an enquiry of this sort. Queen was well aware of this. He respected Jonas's ability and the sources of information that a long professional life had made available to him. He was delighted to have his help.

"I'll dig out the papers," said Michael Doneval, "and see what I can turn up." Although he was now number two in the Aliens' Department at the Home Office, Michael, who had once been Jonas's articled clerk, still tended to call him "sir."

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"If it wouldn't be too much trouble," said Jonas.

"The amount of trouble will depend on when he came over. In the years immediately after the war, I'm told, there was a sort of tidal wave of immigrants. Mostly professional men. Not as many as went to America, of course, but more than enough to keep this department busy. Especially since we weren't back to peacetime staffing levels."

"Difficult to see why a lot of professional men should have wanted to uproot themselves *after* the war was over."

"I imagine," said Doneval drily, "that they'd seen what the Germans were capable of and thought it might be the Russians next. And we must still have been feeling sorry for the people in the occupied countries, because, from what I can see in the records, we were letting them in pretty easily just then. All they had to do was produce one respectable citizen from their own country to act as a reference, give them a clean sheet as far as crime or overenthusiastic cooperation with the Germans were concerned."

"A referee," said Jonas thoughtfully. "If he should happen to be still alive, that would indeed be helpful. We might get the whole story."

"Why don't we talk about it over lunch?" said Doneval. "I'll see if I can get a table at the Travellers."

Over lunch, their talk wandered from the stupidity of the English cricket selectors to reminiscences of Doneval's brief flirtation with the law.

"I was sorry you didn't stick to a solicitor's practice," said Jonas. "You'd have made a great success of it. Even when you were a youngster, I noticed you had a wonderful knack of sidetracking any conversation that looked like getting difficult for you."

"That's useful in the Home Office, too," said Doneval. "You know, sir, one thing you told me is really significant. You say that he didn't appear to have a passport."

"No trace of one."

"Do you think it's possible that he was afraid to apply? There are special rules when the applicant has been naturalized. The passport office has to have certain facts from his pre-naturalization days—country of origin, his original name if it's been changed, and so on. Everything that you've told me seems to suggest that he was anxious to bury his past."

Jonas, who was cutting himself a slice of the club's famous Stilton cheese, said nothing until he had completed this important opera-

tion. Then he said, "Yes, that seems to be the picture that's emerging."

"If you want a word with Fred," Sabrina had said, "you'd better go up to my place about eleven tomorrow. You'll find him in the kitchen, making himself a cup of coffee. Make one for you, too, if you ask him nicely. He's a remarkable person."

Jonas had previously classed Fred as the sort of man you would pass in a crowd without noticing him at all, but when he viewed him across Sabrina's kitchen table he changed his mind. He *was* remarkable. He had a face like a clenched fist. There was strength in the nose and chin and the line of the thin lips was uncompromising. His voice was surprising, too. It was totally classless and unemphatic. He might have been anyone, done anything, been anywhere. The face was giving nothing away.

Not a man to take liberties with, Jonas decided. He said, "Dr. Rainey was my client. I've been asked by the police to see if I can trace his family and his next of kin. We wondered if you could help. You must have known him better than most people."

"I worked for him for two years. He never said anything about his family. Or about himself. When we did talk, it was mostly about gardening or cooking."

"I'm told he was a keen cook. Do you happen to know what he was planning to have for dinner that night?"

"It would have been a mutton stew. He was cutting up the meat when I came for my coffee at eleven. He called it by a French name. Nanny something."

"And all the vegetables came out of the garden?"

"All except the tomatoes. He had some he'd bought from the shop. He didn't fancy shop vegetables. That's why I was going to grow some tomatoes for him. They can be tricky. You need a south wall and a lot of luck."

"But you'd managed all the other vegetables he was using that evening?"

"Right." Fred ticked them off on his thick brown fingers. "Potatoes, onions, peas, mushrooms, globe turnips, artichokes."

"It sounds delicious. Tell me, when you spoke to him that morning, did he seem to be in his usual spirits?"

"He was never a very happy man, I'd judge."

"Oh. What makes you say that?"

"The way he behaved. As if he was afraid that someone was after

him. He'd ask if any stranger had been enquiring for him particularly."

"Can you remember any who had?"

Fred scratched the grizzled hair at the back of his neck while he thought about this. He said, "Only the usual sort of people that I can remember. Trying to sell him double-glazing or insurance or things like that. He'd have no truck with them."

"Did you see him when you went up to the house in the evening to collect your money?"

"I didn't see him. He'd left the money on the kitchen table. I could hear him moving about in the house, though."

"You're sure it was him?"

"Who else would it have been? The meat was in a pan on the fire. He'd need to keep an eye on it, wouldn't he?"

"That would have been five o'clock?"

"I work till five. Then I have to clean up. It would have been a quarter or twenty past."

Jonas finished his coffee and got up. There seemed to be no more that Fred could, or would, tell him. He debated whether he ought to offer him a tip, but decided against it. There was something about Fred which made the idea inappropriate.

When he told Sabrina, she said, "He might have taken it because he's a polite person. But he wouldn't have needed it."

"Has he got a lot of money?"

"Do you know his cottage in Friary Lane? A very agreeable little property. He bought it when he came here four years ago. It's been valued at sixty-thousand pounds and there's no mortgage on it."

"How do you know all this?"

"He's selling it and he's asked me to act for him."

"A tip would certainly have been inappropriate," agreed Jonas. "Have you any idea where his money came from? He can hardly have made it by gardening."

"From something he said, I gathered he had a cottage at his last place. Probably bought it for twenty thousand and sold it for forty thousand. Once you get on the property market, you can't go wrong."

"I suppose not," said Jonas. "You're a cook, Sabrina. If you were planning a dish based on mutton, but involving also—see if I can remember—potatoes, tomatoes, onions, peas, mushrooms, turnips, and artichokes, how long would it take to cook?"

Sabrina was almost licking her lips. "What you're describing," she said, "is that most delicious French dish, a navarin of mutton."

"That's right. It was a French word, 'navvy something,' he said."

"You start by browning the meat in butter. Then you add the spices, with flour to make a roux. Then—"

"I'm not intending to cook it," said Jonas, "I just wanted to know when it would be ready to eat. You can take it that the procedure had already started by a quarter past five."

Sabrina was making some intricate calculations, murmuring to herself words and phrases like "bubble," "stir in," and "simmer." It was a witch's incantation. Then she said, "It'd be ready by half past seven. And eaten by eight. Once it was on the table, he wouldn't want to waste a moment. One thing I don't follow, though. You say that when Fred was describing this dish to you he said it was 'a French word, navvy something.'"

"Yes."

"But that's impossible. He spoke excellent colloquial French. Much better than me, and I used to think I was a dab at it."

"How do you know?"

"I heard him. One of those French onion-sellers had come to the door. I don't think he knew I was in the front room, doing some work. I could hear them chatting."

"And Fred was keeping his end up?"

"He wasn't just talking French. He was talking like a Frenchman. And was the onion-seller lapping it up?"

"It doesn't make sense," said Jonas. He thought about Fred. "Did he say where he was going when he left here? Or why he was leaving?"

"Not where he was going. I asked him that, in case he was thinking of buying a house. But he told me why he was going. He said that what had happened had upset him."

"He didn't look to me," said Jonas, "like the sort of man it would be easy to upset."

Next day, Queen called on him. The Superintendent listened to what Jonas had to tell him. He said, "I haven't got a lot to tell you myself. The B.M.A. looked up their records. Claud Rainey was a Belgian. He came over here at the end of the war, did his training at Barts, and qualified in 1951. Then he came down here and practiced until his retirement eight years ago. A perfectly straight record. They did say one thing, though. It seems he had already got

a long way on with his medical training in Belgium. That being so, there was a concession which would have short-circuited his training here. Only, of course, he had to provide proper details. Apparently he was unable, or unwilling, to do so—which meant he had to start again at the beginning.”

“He certainly seems to have been shy about his past life,” said Jonas. “And I don’t see how we’re going to dig it up.”

The answer to this was on his desk three days later.

“As I expect you will already have discovered,” wrote Michael Doneval, “Claud Rainey, otherwise René Claude, was a Belgian. He came over here in July 1945, with a number of other European immigrants. His ‘sponsor’ was a Bruxellois dentist called Hervé Maxente. As I told you when we met, the office was understaffed and overworked at the time, but that shouldn’t have excused us from spotting that when Maxente came over three months later and changed his name to Max Humbolt *his* ‘sponsor’ was René Claude! Which means, of course, that they could both have been bad hats, sponsoring each other. Humbolt, who set up his practice at Alfriston in Sussex, died four years ago. Now that Rainey’s dead, too, there doesn’t seem much anyone can do about their Siamese twins’ act.”

“A double dead-end,” said Queen when Jonas showed him the letter.

“Maybe,” said Jonas. “But have you noticed one point? Humbolt died four years ago. Four years ago, Rainey barricaded his house and started worrying about strangers who might be enquiring for him.”

“Could be a coincidence.”

“I don’t think it was a coincidence. I think Rainey took his compatriot’s death as a warning. I’ll go further. I think the mysterious man who left his house at six o’clock that morning was the stranger he’d been warned against.”

Queen turned it over in his mind. He was a practical policeman. He distrusted theories, particularly when they seemed to lead nowhere. He said, “So what are you going to do about it?”

“If the office can spare me for a couple of days, I’m going to Alfriston.”

Jonas secured a room at the Star Hotel, which has a Seventeenth Century background of smugglers and secret passages but excellent Twentieth Century accommodation. He did not have to pursue his

enquiries very far. The newsagent from whom he bought his morning *Times* had been one of dentist Humbolt's patients.

"And a right good dentist, too. We couldn't understand why he stuck to a small place like 'Friston. Could have made three times the money in Brighton or Eastbourne. Glad he did, though. Died four or five years ago. Had that big house at the bottom of Hindover Hill. Brigadier Arkinwright has it now."

The Brigadier had been trying to mow his lawn but had given up the attempt. "Grass still too wet," he said. "Come inside. We shall be more comfortable there."

Jonas explained, with certain omissions, what he was after. The Brigadier, who must, he thought, have been at least seventy and long retired, listened politely, if inattentively, to an enquiry which did not concern him. He said, "I never actually met Humbolt. He had no family, you see, so when he died his house was immediately put on the market. I saw it advertised and snapped it up."

"Oh, dear," said Jonas. "Another dead end. If he'd left a widow, she might have been able to help me. It isn't Humbolt I'm after, though. It's a man who was a companion and a close friend of his. He, too, has died without any visible family connections."

"Tiresome," said the Brigadier. "But I don't really know that I can help much."

"Tell me, was there an inquest?"

"Yes, they had to have an inquest. Humbolt had been in pretty good health, you see. And hadn't troubled the doctor for years. So his death was a bit of a mystery. But it turned out to be a coronary. There was a piece in the local paper about it." The Brigadier, who was clearly the sort of man who kept his records under control, went to his desk and fetched out a yellowing clipping. "Keep it if you like."

Jonas thanked him and tucked it away in his wallet.

As they walked out of the front door, the Brigadier said, "Only one thing wrong with this house. Too much garden."

"You keep it very nicely," said Jonas.

"As well as I can, but it's a back-breaking job for a man of my age. I was sorry I couldn't secure the gardener along with the house. Charlie must have been a wonderful worker, despite his game leg. He only came for two days a week, but everything was in apple-pie order when I took it over."

Jonas said, "I suppose he wouldn't still be around?"

"No. He sold his cottage when Humbolt died and moved off. I did see him once before he left. Odd thing was, I was sure I'd seen him before somewhere. Unusual sort of face. He was a popular local character. Someone may know where he's gone."

The newsagent, who was evidently the clearing house for all local gossip, said, "Yes, we all knew Charlie. He worked two days a week for Mr. Humbolt, two days for Mrs. Lamprey, and two for the Clarks. I expect they'll have kept in touch."

"I don't suppose," said Jonas, almost holding his breath, "that you happen to have a photograph of him." As he spoke, he was busy trying to construct a plausible reason for his request.

But to the newsagent, fortunately, it seemed a perfectly natural thing to want. He thought for a moment and then said, "He took first prize for his roses the year before he left. Very popular victory. There was a photograph of the Mayor of Seaford presenting him with the cup. I haven't got a copy myself, but the *Seaford and Newhaven Gazette* could find it for you, I don't doubt."

The *Seaford and Newhaven Gazette* turned the relevant number up for him. Having two copies, they were happy to sell one to Jonas. He cut out the photograph and tucked it away in his wallet alongside the account of the inquest.

He was aware that his trip to Alfriston had not solved the mystery of Dr. Rainey's death. It had added another mystery to it.

Superintendent Queen examined the cuttings deliberately. It was impossible to tell from his face whether he was surprised or annoyed. Both, perhaps, Jonas thought. But he could see the implications clearly enough.

"No doubt about it," he said. "Charlie, who worked for Mr. Humbolt, is the same man as Fred. The photograph's conclusive."

"Quite conclusive."

"But where does it take us?" He was rereading the account of the inquest. "This wasn't a hasty guess by an old bumbler like Smallhorn. The autopsy was conducted by Andrew Friend."

"Very sound man," agreed Jonas.

"And look what he says. 'I understand that the deceased regularly smoked twenty or thirty cigarettes a day. This alone could have brought on the occlusion of the coronary artery which was the direct cause of death.'"

"I've been thinking about that," said Jonas. "Suppose Humbolt's death *was* natural. We know that he and Rainey had some connec-

tion with each other. Something disreputable, perhaps, which had happened in Belgium and made them both bolt like rabbits as soon as the war was over. Rainey hears about Humbolt's death. He doesn't believe it was natural, so he starts to take elaborate precautions. Then Charlie—or Fred, as he now calls himself—arrives. Good jobbing gardeners are so scarce that he must have been confident he'd land a job with Rainey sooner or later. In fact, it took him two years to do it. He probably didn't mind waiting. He's struck me as being a very patient man."

"And you're suggesting it was Fred who poisoned the doctor."

"Who else? Most of the ingredients of his last meal were under his control."

"And that he was the man Trotter saw leaving the house at six in the morning?"

"That seems logical."

"There's nothing logical about it," said Queen irritably. "To start with, how did he get back into the house?"

"Easy. He never left it. There were a lot of places he could have hidden. Pantry, scullery, coal hole, cellar. Remember, he'd had the run of the kitchen quarters and all the time in the world to construct a foolproof hiding place."

"All right, then tell me this. Why didn't he leave as soon as Rainey was dead?"

"It may have been a slow-acting poison."

Queen considered the implications of this. He said, "You're making my flesh creep. Do you mean to say he sat there all night watching Rainey die?"

"Watching him die, yes. And making certain that he didn't telephone or call for help. He was twice as strong as Rainey, who would have been getting even less able to resist as the poison took effect."

"It's hard to believe," said Queen. "Though I'll admit there's one thing that supports your theory. The look on his face. He saw death coming and he hated it. —No question, we shall have to have an exhumation order. Can you authorize it?"

Jonas said, "I'll ask my partner. She's a much better lawyer than I am."

That evening he rang up Michael Doneval at his home. He felt Doneval might be more unbuttoned there than behind his desk. He said, "Thank you very much, Michael. The information you gave me has been extremely useful. In fact, it has opened things up to an almost alarming degree. Now I want your help over one more thing."

"If I can," said Doneval cautiously.

"It's nothing I couldn't get myself, but you'll be able to get it more quickly. Could you find out the known details—nothing which isn't in the public record—of the wartime career of a Brigadier Arkinwright."

"Not a common name," said Doneval. "I ought to be able to do that. I'll telephone you sometime tomorrow."

"I'm very much obliged to you," said Jonas.

Next morning, Sabrina marched into his office with a volume of Probate Court reports and a newspaper. She said, "It wasn't an easy point. There's not much authority on it, because the circumstances are unlikely to arise. However, in *Jepson v. Church 1898* the point had to be considered. Church was sole executor of a man called Ambrose Jepson, who died in somewhat mysterious circumstances which came to light after he had been buried. The police wanted an exhumation order. Church, who was a solicitor, was agreeable. The opposition came from Jepson's sister, his only surviving relative. When the matter came to court, Mr. Justice Romer said, 'In many matters, the authority of the executor is supreme. But in such a matter as this, which touches the feelings of the family and the intimate friends of the deceased, I consider that the opinion of the senior member of the family—or, if no such person survives, of the residuary legatee to whom the estate has been entrusted—should be regarded as paramount.'"

"If that's right, I can't move in the matter. We shall have to ask Jock Lovibond."

"I'm afraid so. However, my researches into your case have not been entirely negative." She set the newspaper, folded open, on Jonas's desk. He saw that it was a copy of the *New York Herald*.

"I have an American friend who sends me reports she thinks I will find interesting."

Jonas had reached a point where he hardly knew what to expect next. The extract was headed SMOKERS BEWARE, and read:

"A posthumous confession has solved a fifteen-year-old mystery which puzzled pathologists and forensic scientists and has opened up an alarming prospect for incautious smokers.

"It seems a Mrs. Sylvester Cramm of Little Falls, Minnesota, lay under considerable suspicion of killing her husband, who had been found dead in the matrimonial home. He had been in good health until that moment. It was public knowledge that he had behaved

brutally to his wife and his death was undoubtedly to her financial advantage. For these reasons, a very careful autopsy was conducted.

"However, leading pathologist, Dr. Paul Schumacher, was clear in his opinion that death was due to a simple coronary occlusion, precipitated, he considered, by the fact that the late Mr. Cramm had been a compulsive smoker. It now appears from the posthumous confession of his wife, a trained nurse, that she had procured some neat nicotine and had injected this into one of her husband's cigarettes. When this was put to Dr. Schumacher, he agreed that the nicotine vaporized by the heat of the cigarette and inhaled could cause an occlusion of the coronary artery. Moreover, such a matter would be difficult or impossible to detect by normal postmortem examination."

Jonas said, "God damn it."

"I'm not suggesting," said Sabrina calmly, "that this was the way in which Humbolt was killed. But it occurred to me that the circumstances in his case were very similar. He was a chain smoker. He lived alone in the house. The gardener had access to it and there are plenty of garden sprays from which nicotine could be extracted."

"You know what's wrong with this case?" said Jonas crossly. "It's all theory and supposition. I sympathize with Jack Queen. He wants facts and they're in short supply. Certainly Fred *could* have poisoned Dr. Rainey. And if he happened to have come across that report, or to have seen the facts reported somewhere else, he might have killed Humbolt that way, too. But why? What in the world is the connection between a dentist in Alfriston, a doctor in Shackleton, and a jobbing gardener? —Yes, what is it?"

Claire said, "I've got a call here from a Mr. Doneval. Shall I put it through?"

"Please."

"Short answer to your question," said Doneval. "Brigadier Arkinwright was a sapper. He fought at Dunkirk and got an M.C. for his efforts on the beaches. Later, being fluent in French, he joined Maurice Buckmaster in the headquarters of the S.O.E. at Baker Street. His job was to equip undercover agents for work in France and Belgium and to debrief them when, and if, they returned. That's the outline. I could fill it in for you a bit more, I expect, if I asked around."

"No," said Jonas. "That's fine. I really am extremely grateful."

Sabrina, who had been listening on the extension, said, "Well, is that your answer?"

"It's a possible answer," said Jonas.

Later that day, he reported his findings to Queen, who listened with his face growing longer and longer.

"It now seems possible," Jonas said, "that Fred—his full name, my partner tells me, is Frederick Charles Blamey—could have worked during the war as an agent in Belgium. He's about the right age and speaks fluent French. Also, he struck me, when I met him, as a tough, self-reliant sort of person. And now we find that Brigadier Arkinwright, who had a job at Special Operations Executive Headquarters, thought he recognized him."

"All right. He could have been. It's not impossible."

"Then I'll make another suggestion: that Rainey and Humbolt, who fudged each other's references, came over at the end of the war as soon as they could pack their bags because they knew that once the proper postwar investigations got going, they would be revealed as undesirable citizens. Collaborators, at least—possibly more than that. They reckoned they'd be a lot safer in England."

"All right," said Queen, "I can paint the rest of your picture. Blamey, who could have suffered as a result of their actions, gets after them—waiting, incidentally, for more than thirty years before he went to Alfriston."

"He was a very patient man," said Jonas. "Like all successful agents and gardeners. And, anyway, what do we know about what he was doing during that time? Rainey and Humbolt might have been the last names on a long list."

Queen looked at him with something like horror. Finally he drew a deep breath and said, "We started this and I suppose we shall have to go on with it."

"Then you'll have to get your exhumation order. If you discover poison and if it's something which was available to Blamey, and if you can dig a convincing motive out of the wartime history, then you'll have some sort of a case."

"That's three ifs," said Queen. "I wouldn't be inclined to bet on our chances."

Three days later, in response to a summons, Jonas went to see Chief Superintendent Whaley. He found Queen with him.

"It's no good," said Jonas. "Jock won't do it. Particularly with a Council election coming up. He says an exhumation would simply antagonize public opinion. It would be seen as pointing a finger at

Fred. He was a very well liked man. Mrs. McClachan, who is Jock's niece by marriage, told him he was not just a good gardener, he was an inspired one, she said. Before he worked for her, she had been trying for years to grow asparagus. No dice. Then Fred came along and got her a bed of it growing *from seed*. A man with such green fingers couldn't conceivably have dipped them in anything dubious. You won't change Jock's mind now, however hard you try, I assure you."

As Jonas said this, he got the impression that neither of his listeners had any real desire to try.

"Well," said Whaley, "if he won't, he won't. And that's an end of that." The relief in his voice was clear.

When this was reported to Sabrina, she said, "Saved by asparagus. What an epitaph for a gardener."

"It's all very well," grumbled Jonas. "You make a joke of it. Whaley and Queen are only too glad to wash their hands of the whole thing. But that's not what I'd call a satisfactory result. I like to know the truth. And now, I suppose, we never shall."

"'Never' is a long time," said Sabrina. "After all, it only took fifteen years for the facts about the Sylvester Cramm case to come to light. Allow me to give you a quote from your favorite author, Winston Churchill. 'Truth is an uncomfortable creature to keep in the well against her efforts.'"

And, in fact, it wasn't fifteen years, but fifteen months before the truth emerged.

It was on an October day in the year following the death of Dr. Rainey that Sabrina came into Jonas's office with a letter in her hand.

She said, "Blamey is dead. Cancer of the stomach. When he knew he was dying, he wrote me this letter—which I will show you on the understanding that it remains entirely confidential."

"Even from Queen and Whaley?"

"Especially from them."

Jonas said, "Very well," and picked up the letter, which was written in a surprisingly firm and educated hand. It opened without any preamble.

"I am writing you this to repay certain kindnesses you did me last year—not only selling my house and making my will for me, but showing me that extract from the *New York Herald*, which was, incidentally, reprinted in the *British Medico-Legal Journal*, avail-

able in the public library. A most interesting publication, I found. When you showed it to me, I realized that you must have a shrewd idea of the truth and that it was time for me to move.

"Yes, certainly I killed Humbolt, whose real name, as you may have discovered, was Hervé Maxente. Also Dr. Rainey, who was René Claude. Both of them deserved to die. They took very large sums of money from the Germans for informing them about British agents for whom, supposedly, they were working. I have no doubt the British government was paying them as well. This double-cross was carried out so skillfully that very few people knew about it. I did, because I got out of a safe house recommended by Maxente by dropping from a second-story window—breaking my leg in the process, incidentally.

"Others were not so lucky. Claude was responsible for one of my closest friends being taken. The Germans were determined to get information from him. It took him eight hours to die. I reminded Claude of this when he was dying.

"The details are not of great importance. I cultivated *Amanita Phalloides*, the death-cap fungus, in a bed against the wall at the bottom of the garden. All that was necessary was to add a few slivers to the field mushrooms waiting for that evening stew. It is a remorseless killer which destroys every liver and kidney cell in the human body, but it takes from six to eight hours to work, so I had to make sure that Claude did not go for help. He finally died just before six o'clock and I let myself out and went home. I had to be back at work by my normal hour, as I needed to root out the remaining fungi, which were in a bed I was supposed to be preparing for tomatoes, and burn them. If I had the time and energy—" Jonas noticed that the writing had been growing more straggly, but was still quite legible "—I'd tell you of one or two other interesting episodes in the years since the war." Then, at the bottom, "Goodbye and again thanks."

A full minute had elapsed after Jonas read the letter before he was able to say anything. Fastening on a minor point, he said, "He must have died a rich man. Who gets his money?"

"It all goes to a trust which looks after the dependents of S.O.E. agents."

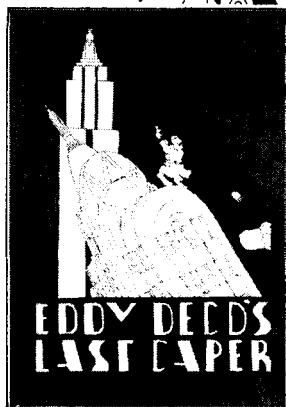
"I see," said Jonas. But that was not what he really wanted to say. In the end he managed to get it out.

"Did it never occur to you," he said, "that by showing him that cutting you were warning him he was suspected?"

The Maltese Falcon never had it so good.

The *New Yorker* cartoonist, Gahan Wilson, recreates detective fiction at its best in this illustrated mystery that stars Taxi Charlie, The Badgize, and the indefatigable hero Eddy Deco. As events unravel, readers may find clues in the more than 100 original, never-before-seen Gahan Wilson drawings.

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THE BIRD OF DAWNING

"Suspected, possibly. But in no danger when Jock Lovibond accepted my advice against exhumation."

Jonas looked at her speechlessly. Then: "You *advised* him to oppose it?"

"Certainly."

"Did you not consider that it was your duty, to the authorities, to the Court, to the State, that this matter should be cleared up?"

"As a solicitor," said Sabrina coldly, "my first duty was to my client."

Heads turned in sympathetic understanding toward the unrestrained sobs issuing from Miss Amy Applegate, Esther Ward's jealously guarded and secretly coveted "little dressmaker." Throughout the assemblage, certain feminine eyes glinted back of the tears with the realization that the clever little Amy, who for years sewed exclusively for Esther, now would be available . . .

LOOK FOR THE UNION LABEL

by **MARGARET CHENOWETH**

The turnout for Esther Ward's splendid funeral would have met even her exacting standards. And she would have approved the easy mingling of the town's hierarchy with its lesser ranks as they crowded together to fill every pew in the Community Church. The full house, Esther would graciously have accepted as her due—a woman for all seasons, all people.

Rest in peace.

And the flowers! Almost overwhelming both in cloying scent and abundance. Gardens and greenhouses for miles around had been stripped in Esther's honor. Her husband Emerson's tribute, a lavish blanket of her favorite red roses, covered the closed coffin. (A strangulation victim is not a pretty sight.) Other elaborate floral pieces were displayed on easels flanking the impressive casket, while massed around its base were dozens of less pretentious but sincere tributes to the star of the day.

Consider the lilies.

"Anyone would think that out of respect for Esther that woman wouldn't make a public display of her condition," Clara Osborne whispered to her nearest neighbor when the very pregnant organist sidled awkwardly onto the bench. As Esther's best friend in life and prime candidate to succeed her in the good-works department, Clara felt well within her rights to pass judgment.

Indeed, were she able, Esther would have suggested—ever so tactfully, of course—securing a substitute for the organist, who was nearing the end of her eighth pregnancy, fearful the woman's per-

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formance would reflect her distressed condition. It did. Frequent wrong notes and ragged tempo threw the soprano soloist quaveringly off-key, causing a restive stir throughout the packed house and thus spoiling what otherwise would have been a perfect memorial for a paragon of a woman.

Esther herself could not have criticized the moving and impassioned eulogy delivered by the Reverend Jasper Holt. Long before he had finished extolling her unstinted gifts of time and monies to the Battered Wives' Refuge, the Heathen Outreaches, and the numerous other causes she so energetically had sponsored, there were few dry eyes. Heads turned in sympathetic understanding toward the unrestrained sobs issuing from Miss Amy Applegate, Esther's jealously guarded and secretly coveted "little dressmaker." Throughout the assemblage, certain feminine eyes glinted back of the tears with the realization that the clever little Amy, who for years sewed exclusively for Esther Ward, now would be available.

The silent minority who knew the chinks in Esther's shining armor were, for the most part, absent. To Jake Daniels, her yard man for twenty years, and the corps of tradesmen and domestic help who had served Esther over the years, she would best be remembered for her exacting standards and excruciatingly slow payment for services rendered. Esther's up-front money went where it was known and shown to her best advantage.

"She's a grand lady, that Mrs. Ward, but it's like pulling hens' teeth to get the pay that's coming to you," one such worker unthinkingly broadcast—heresy that forever after barred her from employment by Esther.

Who, under the spell of Reverend Holt's sonorous voice, could even have guessed the thoughts of Esther's husband, Emerson, sitting alone in the front pew to the right of the flower-draped coffin? His bowed head, shoulders sagging beneath his tailor-made suit (when it came to dressing, he and Esther made a pair, all right), hands ceaselessly clenching and unclenching—every aspect of his attitude showing such tightly controlled grief that many of the tears were for him and his unbearable loss. So generally accepted was the notion that the childless pair, Esther and Emerson, lived only for each other with such harmony and rare devotion that had the onlookers been able to tune in on his thoughts they would have switched to another channel, certain that something was wrong with their sets. For Emerson was hearing, not the Reverend Holt, but Esther's voice reminding him for the millionth time that she knew he'd married

her for her money and Papa's store—the long harangue of grievances she'd harped on for years. The secret festering sore he'd so carefully hidden those same years behind a facade of loving solicitude to her, and painstaking attention to the business he loathed, now gnawed so viciously his slender frame actually shook with the wracking pain. Watchful observers mistakenly gave him points for admirable control over grief.

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit.

As Reverend Holt's deep voice trembled, recounting the grim scenario of Esther's death, Emerson clamped his jaws to keep from shouting, "I'm *free*—oh, God!" while tears, not of sorrow but of joyful release, flowed unchecked.

Let us pray.

Dismissed without the morbid pleasure of viewing the corpse, the disappointed mourners filed out to the church lawn to await, in clustered groups, the appearance of the handsome casket (no expense spared there), followed by Emerson himself. In the open air, random conjectures were lively.

"I've said it before and I'll say it again, a sweeter or more generous woman never lived."

"A saint on earth, and that's a fact."

"Poor Emerson. How will he manage without his precious Esther?"

"They say the killer ripped the diamond rings from her fingers and made off with a fortune from her bedroom wall safe."

"Shh—here comes Emerson, poor man."

Everyone watched Emerson, so controlled and elegant even in this dark hour.

All but Clara Osborne, who was craning to locate Amy Applegate, hoping to beat others to her services. Goodness knows she'd waited years for this opportunity—not that she ever wished Esther dead or anything. She saw the little seamstress, still sobbing but in a lower key, standing apart on the fringe of the gathering. Clara began weaving through the crowd toward her, thus missing the exchange of looks between Emerson and Amy when she lifted her tear-filled eyes to meet his strange, piercing gaze. After a fleeting moment, he turned to enter the waiting limousine as Amy, an abject little figure in black, slipped silently away.

It was not until a discreet time-lapse, long after the books were closed on Esther's unsolved murder, that Emerson paid his first call on Amy.

The investigation had gone on endlessly, always stalling at the same impasse. A pelting rain had washed out any footprints, the rifled wall safe had been wiped clean of fingerprints, and there were no witnesses, only Emerson's straightforward account. And Emerson was above suspicion. His marked devotion to his wife was an accepted fact, and while it was general knowledge that the money was hers, inherited from her rich father, there never had been a hint of friction over that aspect of their relationship.

Time after tiresome time, Emerson told the authorities how he'd gone back to the store after dinner to work on the books. And how later, turning into his own driveway, he had noted the blaze of house lights and wondered if Esther had company, but since no other cars were about he pressed the automatic door control and drove in the garage. He thought he heard a disturbance back of the garage and took a look around, but, finding nothing unusual, concluded all he actually heard was the pelting rain mingled with the sound of loud music coming from inside the house. Esther loved classical music—"fortissimo," he always added with just a hint of a smile. All this was around ten o'clock, he couldn't be sure of the exact time. He'd hung his wet coat and hat on the rack just inside the kitchen door and called out, "I'm home, dear." Receiving no answer, he presumed Esther had not heard him above the stereo. Then he'd looked in the refrigerator, but, seeing nothing of interest, went to look for his wife.

At this point, Emerson would struggle for composure before recounting his shock at finding Esther on the floor of her ransacked bedroom. With some embarrassment, he then would explain that because of his wife's frail health they occupied separate bedrooms. What he did not admit was that Esther had locked her bedroom door to him ten years before, after she'd caught him coming out of the maid's room late one night. An episode that also marked the end of live-in help.

Lead us not into temptation.

With real or remembered agitation, Emerson next would recite how he'd fallen to his knees and tried to lift her but, noting the tightly twisted scarf around her neck and her blotchy, distorted features, realized she was beyond help. He remembered closing the terrace doors against the lashing wind and rain, noting that Esther's new white rug and blue-silk draperies were soaked—ruined. Then he saw the wall safe was open, its contents thrown about, and discovered the heavy brown envelope in which Esther always kept

several thousand dollars in large bills was empty. It wasn't until after he called the police that he discovered Esther's rings were missing from her hands. At this point in his often repeated testimony, Emerson would stifle a groan and cover his face with trembling hands.

"Sorry to put you through this, Mr. Ward, but we have to keep digging, hoping you'll recall something, anything, that will give us a lead."

"I understand. It's just that—"

At last, no nearer to a solution than the night of Esther's death, the decision for the record was "killed by person or persons unknown" and the file on Esther Ward was closed.

Emerson now was a free man. And rich.

His courtship of Amy Applegate, his dead wife's seamstress, was so low key, coming long enough after the tragedy for the town almost to have forgotten poor Esther's murder, that at first it scarcely was noticed. It wasn't until they had become a "couple," frequently seen dining in one of the out-of-the-way places, going to band concerts in the park, entering or leaving the drive-in movie, that folks got the drift. But more than anything else, it was Amy's dramatically changed appearance that caused comment.

"I know for a fact she's forty if she's a day, but lately she's been looking and acting like a sixteen-year-old. So pretty and stylish."

"Taking care of her invalid mother aged her before her time but she's certainly making up for it now."

"Well, I for one don't begrudge her any pleasure she gets. She's earned every minute of it."

"Yes, it's so nice for both Emerson and Amy. Two lonely people."

The final official approval was voiced by Clara Osborne, who, having beaten all others to Amy's dressmaking skills, could afford to be generous. "Amy sewed for Esther so long, she was almost one of the family. It's only natural she and poor Emerson should turn to each other."

And turn they did. Circumspect in public, their times alone were something else: increasingly frequent heights of barely restrained ardor, tantalizingly near the fulfilment Emerson so desperately longed for. Amy, at the last second before abandonment, suddenly would primly disengage herself from Emerson's passionate embrace with a tearful, "No—no, *I mustn't*, it's sinful, *wrong!*"

"Then, my darling," Emerson would plead in his frustration, "set a date—can't you see what this is doing to me?"

"Are you sure, *absolutely sure*, you love me?" Amy would counter.

"More than life," he said, wondering if he'd survive the wait for absolute truth to come. Only then could he hope to hear the words he so longed for, words that would bind them forever—the truly perfect union.

They were married in a wayside chapel, with obliging tourists serving as witnesses. Immediately after the ceremony, Emerson hurried his bride along a winding path to the secluded rustic cottage he had engaged for their honeymoon. Inside, he locked the door and, before taking Amy in his arms, set a match to the logs in the fireplace. As the flames blazed up, lighting his feverish eyes, he said, "Shall I order dinner now—or later?"

From the depths of the large wing chair where she huddled, incredibly small and wide-eyed, Amy said softly, shyly, "Later, I guess—yes, later."

Pulling her to her feet, Emerson crushed her close. As he fumbled with her dress zipper, she slipped from his arms and, with a whispered "Don't go away," slipped from the room.

Was it really at hand, that moment of revelation he wanted above all else? Dropping onto the bed, Emerson closed his eyes and waited with pounding heart. Then Amy stood before him, lovelier than he could have imagined, her light-brown hair in soft waves to her shoulders, the firelight casting a rosy sheen to her flawless skin. He held out his arms, and as they enfolded her she said tremulously, "Emerson, there's something I *have* to tell you first. It's so awful you might not want me after you hear it. I know I should have told you sooner, much sooner, but I was afraid—afraid I'd lose you."

Scarcely breathing, now that it was coming, he urged quietly, "Don't you know you can never lose me? Ours is the perfect union, a commitment to complete sharing—"

Still hesitant, Amy said, "First you have to promise you'll still love me—no matter what."

"Yes, yes, I promise. Amy, dear, tell me, *tell me*."

"Well, to begin with, I always hated Esther for the way she treated you. So lovey-dovey in public, but at home she was always putting you down until I wanted to—to *kill her!*"

As though shocked at her own vehemence, Amy hesitated a long moment before continuing. "You don't know how it was all those

years. The way she kept at me. Never satisfied, always complaining. 'Take it up here, let it out there'—calling at all hours to shorten a hem, lengthen a hem. Never any consideration for my time or my feelings. And she was so slow in paying, kept putting me off—and she knew how much I needed the money. Many times I'd have quit for good—only, well, that would have meant never seeing you again."

"My darling girl, my true love," Emerson said, silently willing her to continue.

"That night—oh, dear God, that awful night," Amy began—then, momentarily overcome, leaned against Emerson as she stifled dry, choking sobs. Emerson held her protectively, stroking her soft hair, until at last on a shuddering breath she continued.

"It was raining hard—I'd gone to bed early to read. At about eight-thirty, Esther phoned and *ordered* me to come *at once* to let out the side seams on a blue-silk I'd made for her before she put on all that weight. She was determined to wear it next day and wouldn't take no for an answer.

"I got out of bed and dressed, mad at myself for always giving in to her. I took a bus to the nearest corner, then walked the rest of the way. As I splashed along, getting wetter and wetter and madder and madder, I made up my mind to have it out with her. At least make her give me the money I had coming. It was nearly three months since she'd paid me a cent and I'd almost used up what money was left from my mother's small insurance policy."

Eyes closed, an anticipatory smile on his face, Emerson listened avidly as Amy continued.

"There were lights all over the house and music blasting the way she always liked it. I went around to the back door, as she always insisted, and walked in without knocking. Esther was in her bedroom, struggling to pull the blue dress over her head.

" 'Come here and help me in or out of this thing,' she said. 'I *told* you you were making it too tight.' "

"The zipper was stuck, and as I was working to free it she said, 'Hurry up, you idiot, do you want me to smother to death?' "

As though to outrun the horror of remembering, Amy rushed on. "I'll never know what possessed me, but instead of helping her get the dress on, I jerked the zipper to the top, pinning her arms to her sides. She was helpless. Then I really went crazy and grabbed the plastic dress-bag she'd let fall to the floor and pulled it down over her head and shoulders, shutting off the air. It was so awful, watch-

ing her gasping for breath, making those dreadful choking noises, but worse was the look she gave me when she finally fell at my feet.

"She closed her eyes, her breathing stopped, but I waited until I was sure she was dead before I took off the plastic bag and stuffed it in my shoulder tote. Then I unzipped her dress and somehow managed to get her arms in the sleeves, then zipped it up again. A scarf went with the dress and I pulled it tight around her neck to make it seem she'd been strangled."

In the dying firelight, Emerson's arms tightened around the now hysterical Amy. "Yes, my dearest love," he said, "that's exactly how it was."

Amy drew away. "Emerson, I don't understand. You can't know how horrible it was."

"I can know, darling—because I was there."

"You were *there*? Emerson, what are you saying?"

"I watched it all from the doorway."

"You were *there*? You watched—you *let* me kill her?"

Emerson nodded in quiet affirmation.

"I don't believe this!" Amy shrieked. "Then it was *you* who robbed the safe and took her rings! How convenient for you, how *very* convenient!"

With repugnance, she looked at the two rings sparkling on her left hand. As she tugged to pull them off, Emerson smiled. A dreadful smile.

"My dearest Amy, it was ingenious. In my wildest dreams, I would never have thought you capable of such daring, such precision. You were magnificent. At that very moment, I fell in love with you—knew I'd met my match at last, my equal in every way."

Amy struggled helplessly to escape his relentless grasp.

"Now we're truly one, bound together forever," he whispered, his lips seeking hers. There was no response. Amy had fainted dead away.

Happy is the bride the sun shines on.

"Q"

a **NEW Ben Snow** story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"He used a lot of different backgrounds," Martha Van Braun told Ben, "and sometimes he'd leave the backgrounds blank until he had a buyer and he could give them whatever they wanted. I suppose I must be hanging in a hundred bars and men's clubs—and in some private homes, too. I suppose it's a sort of fame . . ."

THE NUDE OVER THE BAR

by **EDWARD D. HOCH**

Ben Snow first heard about the painting over Logan's bar from an old Indian named Running Fox at the stagecoach station north of Enid, in the Oklahoma Territory. The year was 1896 and Running Fox, who'd fought the Indian Wars most of his life, was lame and feeble by that time. He still enjoyed a drink, though, and Logan's was one of the few places around where nobody minded drinking next to an Indian. It was at a crossroads not far from Enid, a sporting place where cowboys gathered each July to race their horses in the summer heat.

"You know the painting over Logan's bar?" the old Indian asked Ben, who had paused to water his horse Oats and fallen into conversation with the elderly man.

"I've been there," Ben replied. "You mean the nude redhead stretched out on the sofa, with the racehorses in the background." It wasn't the sort of painting one easily forgot.

"That's the one," Running Fox said. "It's changing."

"What do you mean, changing? Are the colors fading?"

"No. The horses in the background are changing position."

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"Come on, old man!" Ben scoffed. "You've been too long in the sun."

"Go there and see for yourself. Running Fox does not lie."

Ben thought no more about it as he watered his horse and purchased supplies at the general store. He was bound for Texas, looking for work at one of the big ranches. He'd heard rumors of a cattle drive that would soon be heading north. With no other immediate prospects for employment, that sounded good to him.

Still, as he swung Oats back on the trail heading toward Enid, he realized that a stop at Logan's bar wouldn't really be out of his way. It had always been a congenial place, and with the big summer race only two days away he might even meet some cowpokes who could give him tips on the technicalities of a cattle drive.

He reached the crossroads just before sundown, well into the evening hours at this time of year. Both hitching posts in front of Logan's were filled with horses and Ben could see that a number of campsites had already been occupied nearby, though it was only an hour's ride from Enid and many of the racers and spectators wouldn't arrive until the day of the race.

Ben encountered his first familiar face in the doorway of the bar. Scotty French often worked some of the same spreads as Ben, and he greeted him now with a warm handshake. "How are you, fella? Been riding long?"

Ben shook his head. "I stopped for water at the coach station. I'm headed for Enid and points south."

"Still hiring out your gun?"

"Those days are pretty much gone, Scotty. I'm looking for ranch work now."

"Let me buy you a drink."

The bar was crowded, but Scotty barreled through, finding them a place. He was a big man with dark features and a mean look that said he was not someone to cross. "I never argue with a drink," Ben told him, finding himself directly in front of Max Logan's famous nude painting. He'd seen it only a couple of times before, but it looked the same to him.

"I suppose you heard about the painting," Scotty said.

"An old Indian mentioned it at the coach stop. Told me it was changing."

"That's what they say."

"She looks the same to me," Ben decided, studying the ample flesh of the reclining redhead.

"It's the horses in the background that are changing. All these years, number 5 has been in the lead, followed by 2 and 4. Now all of a sudden, a few weeks ago, number 2 took the lead. Nobody could believe it."

Ben squinted at the racehorses in the background. "Looks to me as if horse number 4 is in the lead."

"That's because it changed again last week. Max is plumb out of his mind with worry. He thinks the place is haunted."

Ben could see Max Logan down at the other end of the long bar, his familiar grizzled head bent over as he listened to some cowpoke's sad story. He had a beard that was also grizzled and also trimmed fairly short, making him appear older than his forty-odd years. "Maybe it is," Ben replied. "Or else Max thinks it would bring in more customers for the race."

"Who needs more customers? It's the only bar between here and Enid."

"He still got that good-looking wife?"

Scotty smiled into his drink. "Avis? She left him last month. From what I hear, she took off in the middle of the night with some Mexican."

"She was always more woman than Max could handle." After a while, Scotty became involved in a conversation to his other side and Ben picked up his glass and moved down the bar to a vacant spot near the barkeep.

When Max Logan spotted him, he broke off his conversation with the cowpoke and raised his hand. "Ben Snow! I haven't seen you in these parts lately."

"I've been up north."

"You gonna race your horse on Saturday?"

"I hadn't planned to. Old Oats isn't much of a racer."

"I'll bet he could beat some of them nags. There's a thousand dollars in gold for the winner."

"It's tempting," Ben admitted. "But tell me about this painting over the bar. I made a special trip here to see it."

"Yeah, I guess it's the talk of the territory now. It always was an attention-getter."

"They say the horses change position."

"I guess so. I didn't notice it until a few weeks ago when Adam Korol from the Lazy Bar rode in. He hadn't been here in a few days, but he pointed out that number 5 was always in the lead on the painting—he'd bet that number in last year's race because of it."

Ben didn't know Korol, but he didn't know most of Logan's customers. "And the numbers changed again last week, I understand."

"That's right. This time *I* spotted it first, soon as I opened up Friday afternoon. Someone's been sneaking in here at night and changing the numbers."

"Why would anyone do that?"

"Beats me." Logan picked up a bar rag and started polishing the wood. Then someone called for another round and he moved away to fill the order.

When he returned, Ben had a suggestion. "Want me to look into it for you?"

"What for?"

"I've done a little investigating in my day. Maybe I can find out something."

"Forget it. It's probably some of the regulars having a laugh at my expense."

"What if it's something else, Max? What if somebody's trying to fix Saturday's race and influence the betting? Unless the painting changes again, a lot of people are going to have their money on number 4."

"Hell, the numbers aren't even assigned till Saturday morning. Who'd want to go to all that trouble to fix our little horserace?"

"For a hundred dollars I'll see what I can find out," Ben promised.

"Forget it." Max Logan walked away to pour more whiskey at the other end of the bar. But just as Ben was about to leave, he came back. He took a rumpled fifty-dollar bill from his pocket and smoothed it out against the bar. "See what you can do for that. If you find out who's been doing it, there's another fifty in it for you."

The picture had been painted several years back by an artist who'd settled in Enid. His name was Frank Spraguss and Ben considered riding into town to find him. But first he decided to pay a call on Adam Korol at the Lazy Bar ranch because it was closer. He rode out there first thing in the morning and was somewhat surprised to learn that Korol was entered in the following day's race and was out in the pasture working with his horse, a big grey gelding that moved like the wind around an oval track marked off with bales of hay.

When Korol finally reined in the gelding and climbed down from the saddle, Ben went out to meet him. "Are you Adam Korol? They told me at the house I could find you back here."

"That's right." Korol was a tall, lanky fellow in his twenties. His clothes hung on him like a scarecrow and he moved with the awkwardness of a teenaged farm boy.

"You looked good on that horse."

"I'm gonna win me that thousand dollars tomorrow."

"Good luck to you."

Korol glanced over at Oats, sizing him up. "*Your* horse racing?"

"I haven't decided yet. My name's Ben Snow. I rode out to ask you about something else."

"What would that be?" Korol asked.

"It's about the oil painting over Logan's bar."

Korol's face broke into a grin. "Yeah. Craziest thing I ever saw."

"I hear you were the first to notice that the horses changed position."

"Yeah, I guess I was. Really it was just the numbers on the horses that changed. The horses all look pretty much alike. I only noticed the difference because I bet on number 5 in last year's big race."

"And a couple of weeks ago it wasn't first any more."

"No. It had fallen back to second place. How could that be?"

"And why?"

"I told Max Logan about it and he was as puzzled as everyone else. The word just spread from there and pretty soon folks were flocking in to see for themselves. Max had to tell the story to everyone, but he didn't seem to mind. I guess it helped take his mind off his troubles. Then last week it happened again. This time Max noticed it himself. He told me as soon as I came in that day."

"You go in every day?"

"In the evenings when I can. There's not much else to do for entertainment around here. Sometimes I miss a day or two if we're busy working."

"Thanks for your help," Ben said. "I'll be watching you race tomorrow."

He was aware of the young man's eyes on him as he went off down the dirt road. Soon he picked up the trail into Enid and rode hard until the first buildings of the town came into view.

Enid had sprung up literally overnight as a tent town in 1893, when the Cherokee Strip was first opened to settlement. Bizarrely named by a railway official who remembered a character from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, the town now boasted several permanent buildings and houses, with more going up all the time. There were

not so many, though, that Ben had any trouble finding the place where Frank Spraguss lived. It was a small white house surrounded by a picket fence.

There was no one at home.

Ben spotted a woman tending her garden next door and went over. "I'm looking for Frank Spraguss," he told her.

"That artist fellow? I haven't seen him all week. Maybe he's away."

"Does he travel often?"

"Every few months. He loads his paintings into a wagon and journeys around selling them. Mostly to saloons, if you ask me."

"I don't see a wagon," Ben observed. "Does he keep it at the stable?"

"No, it's usually behind the house." The woman took off her sun-bonnet, revealing a pleasant middle-aged face. "I guess he's away, all right."

"Is there anyone around who might know where I can reach him?"

The woman squinted into Ben's face, shielding her eyes from the sun. "I suppose you might try his ex-wife. I guess that's what she is, though some folks doubt they were ever married."

"Where would I find her?"

"She works at the land office, down next to the jail. You can't miss it. Ask for Martha Van Braun."

Ben thanked her and rode in the direction she'd indicated. The land office was busy when he entered, but it took him only an instant to realize which of the female clerks must be the woman he sought. Martha Van Braun was the well endowed redhead whose nude portrait hung on the wall above Logan's bar.

"Miss Van Braun?" he asked when she seemed to have a free moment. "My name is Ben Snow. I'm trying to locate your former husband."

She glanced around nervously. "Who told you about me?"

"His neighbor said you might know where he is."

"Well, I don't. Please go away."

"It's about one of his paintings—"

"I'll bet it is. I don't pose for those any more, Mr. Snow. If I had my way, I'd burn every last one of them." Her voice was low but determined.

"I'm sorry to embarrass you, Miss Van Braun. I'm only trying to locate Frank Spraguss."

"Well, I don't know where he is."

"Could he be off on a selling trip?"

"I suppose so."

"His wagon's gone."

"Then that's probably where he is. He may not be back for a week or more, depending on how fast he sells the latest load of paintings. He used to plot his journeys on a wall map in his studio before he started. He'd write in the dates next to each town on the map."

"That's what I need to see, to find out where he is today."

"What's so urgent?"

"One of his paintings has developed a problem. I think he might have some answers for me."

"Well—" She hesitated, then said, "I still have my key to his house. He never asked for it back."

"Could you get off work for a half hour or so? It would help me a great deal."

Martha studied Ben and reached a decision. "I suppose so," she said.

He walked beside her down Enid's main street, leading Oats behind. "This is about the painting at Max Logan's bar. Do you know the one I mean?"

She shrugged. "They're all the same to me."

"They have a horse race up at Logan's every July. It's set for tomorrow."

"I suppose that just means more men to come leer at my picture."

"I should think you'd be proud of it."

She turned her face away. "I should have had my head examined for ever posing like that."

They reached the house and Ben tied Oats to the fence while Martha searched her purse for the key, found it, and unlocked the front door.

The smell was the first thing Ben noticed.

"What is that?" she started to ask, but he was already leading her back out the door.

"Wait outside," he ordered. "Don't come in."

Holding a handkerchief over his own nose and mouth, he reentered the house. Spraguss's studio was in the rear and as Ben came to the open door he was confronted by a dozen large canvases of the nude Martha Van Braun, almost all exactly like the one that hung at Logan's bar. Only the backgrounds were noticeably different. Some showed cattle drives, one had a slick gambler dealing cards, several more had no backgrounds at all—nothing but bare canvas. But one of them was shredded—and behind it Ben found the body of a man

whose chest had been blown away by a shotgun blast fired at fairly close range. By the condition of the body, Ben guessed he'd been dead for several days.

He went outside to Martha Van Braun. "I'm sorry to ask you this, but there's a body inside. Could you look at it and tell me if it's your husband?"

"I—yes." She was deathly pale.

"The smell is pretty bad. Put this handkerchief over your mouth."

Ben led her inside, keeping a firm grip around her shoulders.

When she saw the body she started to retch and he led her quickly away.

"Yes," she managed to gasp, "that's Frank."

The sheriff came and asked some perfunctory questions, then decided it had been a robbery and nothing more.

"There's no sign of forced entry," Ben pointed out.

"Let me worry about it, Mr. Snow. And if you don't want to be locked up as a material witness, I'd suggest you get out of town fast. We don't like gunfighters here."

"I'm no—"

"Just be happy he's been dead several days. Otherwise I'd have you in a cell already."

Ben waited outside the jail until the sheriff finished his questioning of Martha. As she left the building, he intercepted her. "I have to ask you one more thing about Frank's paintings. Were you his only subject?"

She'd dried her eyes and recovered her composure somewhat. "The only one for the last six or seven years."

"He did all those canvases of you, all in pretty much the same pose?"

She nodded. "He used a lot of different backgrounds, and sometimes he'd leave the backgrounds blank until he had a buyer and he could give them whatever they wanted. I suppose I must be hanging in a hundred bars and men's clubs—and in some private homes, too. I suppose it's a sort of fame."

"Why did you leave him?"

"I got tired of it. He didn't care about me, only how my body looked in his paintings. I finally told him to get a new model."

"What will you do now?"

She must have thought he meant that day. "Go back to work at the land office. I was only supposed to be gone for half an hour . . ."

It was evening by the time Ben arrived back at the crossroads by Logan's place. The number of campers had grown through the day and a small city of tents seemed to have sprouted in preparation for the following day's race. He was surprised to see the old Indian, Running Fox, seated on the back of a wagon. "So you came, after all," the Indian said when Ben approached him.

"You got me curious. I had to see the painting."

"Is it as I said?"

"So they tell me."

"Will you be racing tomorrow?"

"I might be," Ben conceded.

He found Max Logan inside, counting the day's receipts while two assistants tended bar. "I was wondering where you'd gone," Logan said.

"I took a ride down to Enid."

"What'd you find there?"

"Frank Spraguss's body. Someone killed him."

Logan stopped counting the money. After a while, he said, "You think it's connected with the changes in my painting?"

"I don't know," Ben answered honestly. "The whole thing doesn't make much sense."

"We got twenty-seven riders for the race tomorrow. That's more than last year."

"Make it twenty-eight. I'm riding, too."

"Good—the more the better."

Ben spent the next few hours drinking with Scotty French, talking over old times. Scotty was racing, too, and planning how he'd spend his winnings. "Got an eye on a homestead down Texas way, enough land to make a nice start."

"I wish you luck, Scotty."

In the morning, while Ben was fixing breakfast over a campfire, Running Fox brought word that the painting had changed again. This time, horse number 5 was back in the lead.

Max Logan himself conducted the drawing for post positions. Ben and Scotty watched from a distance as he said a few words first. "As most of you know, Logan's bar is famous for two things—the race we run every July and the painting of the charming red-haired lady that hangs inside there. I like to think of her as the spirit of Logan's, and of the Oklahoma Territory. Now I don't know what's been happening here these past few weeks with that painting. I

think maybe some of you have been pulling my leg. Horses don't change position in a painting unless someone sneaks in during the night and repaints their numbers. It happened again last night, but no matter—the whole thing's given me an idea. From now on, at the conclusion of each year's race, I'll paint the numbers of the three winning horses on the horses in the portrait. They'll remain there for the entire year as a tribute to the winners."

A cheer went up from the crowd and one of the bartenders came forward with a cigar box full of numbered slips of paper. "This must be the hard part for him," Scotty said to Ben. "His wife drew the numbers last year."

"Avis can't be with us this year," Logan announced. "She's vacationing in Mexico." Some of the spectators exchanged knowing glances. "So I'm going to ask one of the charming young ladies who *are* with us this morning to step forward and draw the post positions for each horse."

A couple of women started forward, but they were stopped suddenly by a voice from the rear. "I'll do it!" a woman called out. The crowd fell away as she worked her way to the front—and every man there recognized her at once as the redhead from the painting.

Ben knew her as Martha Van Braun and wondered what had brought her to Logan's bar on race day.

Max Logan was obviously as surprised to see his "spirit of Logan's" in the flesh as was everyone else. He welcomed her to the makeshift platform on which he stood and was a bit flustered when she greeted him with a kiss on the cheek. "This is really an honor," he managed to announce. "Tell me your name, Miss—"

"I'm Martha Van Braun." She hardly looked like a grieving widow in her long green dress, scooped low in the front. She wore a hat to match and carried a frilly little umbrella against the sun. It was a costume better suited to Kansas City than to the crossroads at Logan's, but there were no complaints from the cowhands.

"What brings you here?" Logan asked, not yet fully recovered from the surprise of her appearance out of the crowd.

"A friend told me about your race. I wanted to see it."

Ben knew it was his mention of the painting that had really brought her. He was fascinated by the whole performance, and especially by the blank look she gave him when he went forward to get his position number.

"Ben Snow," Logan intoned.

She drew a slip from the cigar box and read off, "Number 17." A bartender came forward with the numbered saddlecloth and Ben took it and stepped off the platform. Scotty French followed him up and drew number 6.

Toward the end of the line, Ben recognized Adam Korol, the gangly cowboy he'd questioned the previous day. Korol drew number 12, and in a moment the racers were walking to their horses. There was some interest in the rider who'd drawn number 5, since the painting now had that horse in the lead, but one look at the sway-backed nag wearing that number brought only derisive hoots.

"This year we've shifted the race course a bit to the east," Logan announced, "but it's still the same distance—a mile and a quarter. Post time is eleven o'clock, thirty minutes from now."

The betting commenced with great enthusiasm. Ben avoided making any bets himself, but Scotty and the others were putting down bills and silver dollars and even nuggets of gold, betting on themselves and others. The rules were strictly informal at Logan's race-track.

Ben used the time before the race to seek out Martha. "I didn't expect we'd be seeing each other quite so soon," he told her.

"You mentioned the race, and this mysterious picture of me. I thought it was something I should see. There's nothing for me in Enid."

"You acted like you didn't know me up on the platform."

"I thought maybe you were undercover."

"I'm no marshal, if that's what you're thinking. Did you see the picture?"

She nodded. "Just now."

"It's an authentic Spraguss?"

"Of course. You saw his studio. He turned them out by the dozen. Maybe it wasn't so bad as I thought."

"Are you going back for his funeral?"

"I haven't decided yet. I might find something better here than working for the land office."

"If you run away, they'll think you killed him."

"Let them think what they want. If I'd killed him, I'd have run away before the body was found."

That made sense, but Ben wasn't making any bets on Spraguss's killer. It wasn't a day for betting horses or killers. She drifted off and he went to get Oats. The horse was impatient, seeing all the others working out, and Ben quickly tied the saddlecloth in place,

swung himself up, and let Oats take him on a canter around the course, which had been laid out in an oval with bails of hay. Presently he came upon Adam Korol, who was also touring the track.

"You look as good as you did back on the ranch," Ben remarked.

"I liked last year's course better. See how the trees block that far end? This way the noonday sun reflecting on the creek will dazzle us as we round the corner. I don't know why Logan moved it."

Ben hadn't even noticed the creek. He decided Korol was a very methodical and observing young man.

Logan called for the racers a little bit late and it was twenty to twelve before everyone was lined up and ready at the starting rope. He'd pressed Martha into service again, to drop her handkerchief for the start. As it fluttered down, the rope was yanked up over the heads of horses and riders and they were off.

The field of horses, twenty-eight wide at the beginning, quickly narrowed to a handful of leaders who broke away early. Ben recognized Scotty French's chestnut colt up ahead, leading the pack. Oats wasn't a racer but he was holding his own sturdily among the first half dozen. They rounded the first turn, pounding the earth like thunder, and a couple of leaders started to fall back. Before he realized it, Ben had only Scotty's horse ahead of him.

But not for long. In the back stretch, he felt the breeze as Adam Korol passed him easily, and after that it was a two-horse race. Korol and Scotty battled for the lead around the far turn and into the home stretch, Oats dropping behind until he was trailing by three full lengths. Then, as the finish line neared, Korol took a commanding lead and crossed it the easy winner. Scotty was second and Ben was a surprising third.

"You rode well," Ben told Scotty as he dismounted. "Is there any money for second and third?"

"You mean you entered without knowing?"

"I had other things on my mind," Ben admitted.

"I won five hundred and you get two-fifty. Plus our winning numbers on the painting over Logan's bar."

They went inside to watch Martha do the honors with a brush and paint. "I always wanted to touch up Frank's paintings," she confided to Ben behind the bar. The painting hung low enough so that she needed no stool to make the changes. "While I'm doing this, I should paint a pair of bloomers on me," she told Logan.

"My business would be ruined!" he protested with mock horror.

If the purpose of the race was to bring customers to the bar, it

succeeded mightily. The place was mobbed for the rest of the afternoon and into the evening. Just before sundown, Ben went for a walk outside. He strolled along the course of the day's race, and over to where it had been run in previous years. Then he went to visit Oats, to be sure he had the best feed as a reward for his performance that morning.

It had been a long day, but Ben still had more to do.

He waited until well after dark when most of the revelers had passed out or drifted away to their tents. Then he procured a shovel from the tool shed behind the bar and headed out to a spot some distance away. He dug quickly until his muscles began to tire, then slowed until he hit something at a depth of about three feet.

There were pieces of wood and something else. Ben uncovered as much as he could and then struck a match to see what he had. He was staring into the face of Martha Van Braun.

There was an instant of shock before he realized it was merely another painting. It wasn't what he'd been looking for, but he should have known it would be there. He pulled away the tattered canvas, trying to see beneath it.

"How did you find it?" a voice above him asked. "How did you know?"

Ben swung around, seeing the silhouette of a man outlined against the moonlit sky. It was Max Logan and he was pointing a shotgun toward the hole Ben had dug.

"I was just earning my money," Ben said, trying to keep his voice calm. "You paid me to find out who changed the numbers on the painting, remember?"

"What did you find in there?" Logan's voice was hoarse and raspy.

"The original painting from behind your bar—shredded by a blast from the very shotgun you're now holding, I'll wager. But you didn't dig this deep just to bury a painting. Underneath is the body of your wife, Avis. She never did make it to Mexico, did she?"

Ben heard the click of the hammers being pulled back as Max Logan cocked both barrels of his weapon. "You know too much, Snow. How'd you find it all out?"

Ben spoke quickly, giving him the whole story, knowing Logan wouldn't shoot until he'd heard it all. "I noticed tonight that your painting was about at head level—Martha could easily reach it without a stool. When I found the artist's body yesterday, lying behind a painting shredded by a shotgun blast, the image stuck in my mind.

Today I began to think about something similar happening in your bar—someone killed by a shotgun while standing behind the bar, in front of the painting. The body could be hidden or buried somewhere, but the painting had to be replaced, too, or the truth would be known. Spraguss lived in Enid, only an hour's ride from here, and he had almost identical canvases ready to go. Only the background needed to be added. Perhaps he even had one with racehorses already in it."

"He did," Logan confirmed. "But we got the numbers wrong. —But what makes you think it was me killed Avis?"

"Who else could it have been? This wasn't an ordinary barroom shooting, or there'd have been no need to go to such lengths to cover it up. That implied a shooting after hours. If the victim was behind the bar, in front of the painting, it pointed to one of the employees or the owner. Who was missing? Who disappeared at about that time? I was told Avis took off last month with a Mexican, in the middle of the night. And Adam Korol spotted the change in the painting a few weeks ago. Since he rides in every night when he can, I assume the change was made very shortly before he noticed it—just about the time your wife disappeared. There was no Mexican, of course, or you might have killed them both and claimed the unwritten law as a defense."

"She goaded me into it. She really was going to leave me, she told me so. I picked up the shotgun and she dared me to use it. I think it was around three in the morning, long after we'd closed. We were both a little drunk. I buried her body in that hole with the ruined painting on top of it. Then I rode into Enid. I was at Spraguss's house just after dawn and I rented a wagon to bring the new painting back."

"Why'd you kill Spraguss?" Ben asked.

"I never planned to—I didn't! But Korol made a big thing out of the numbers being in the wrong order. Finally I changed them again myself, figuring to cloud the issue, make people think it was a ghost or something. But by that time, the word was all over the region. I knew the artist would hear about it and tell someone the truth, then they'd start asking questions about what happened to the original painting and why I needed a replacement in the middle of the night. I rode down to see him again last weekend and took my shotgun along."

"I guessed it was something like that," Ben said. "Korol got worked up about you moving the race course today, and that made me cu-

rious, too. It was a mistake to dig Avis's grave along the path of the race, as you realized too late. All those pounding hooves on the freshly turned earth might have caused it to sink. You moved the course, but walking over the old one tonight I noticed this spot where the earth looked fresher. So I dug it up."

"I saw you take the shovel out of the tool shed. —I knew it was a mistake to hire you, but when you suggested it I could hardly refuse. I'm sorry I have to kill you, too." Logan shifted his stance.

"Don't be a fool!" Ben shouted, going for his gun. He knew he had no chance against the double barrels of the shotgun, but when the single crack of gunfire came a split-second later it was oddly low and muffled.

Max Logan twisted around, letting go of his weapon, and toppled over.

Ben saw Martha appear at the edge of the grave, still wearing her long green dress. She held a small Derringer in her right hand.

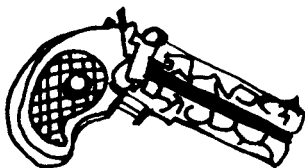
"That was the least I could do for my husband," she said quietly.

Scotty French met Ben as he saddled up in the morning. "You leaving already?" he asked. "I just heard Logan's dead and I didn't collect my money yet. Someone said the marshal's coming up from Enid."

"You can find out and tell me about it, Scotty. I've got to get moving south. Maybe we'll meet again along the trail somewhere."

"Is the Van Braun woman still in town? What in hell happened, anyway?"

But Ben merely waved goodbye and rode off, heading for Texas.



a **NEW** short story by

BRENDAN DuBOIS

The air-hose bells out front rang and Brad looked up expectantly from the paper. The sun was hot on his back as he ambled outside, remembering all the tourists that had come through before the Interstate was finished, buying out his beer and chips, making the cash register sing.

A new tale from Brendan DuBois that might fairly be called American gothic . . .

OFF THE INTERSTATE

by **BRENDAN DuBOIS**

Brad Poole thought, Business sure is bad. Through the open door of the store, propped open by the last year's rakes he couldn't sell, he could look down the porch steps at the twin gasoline pumps and the empty tarmac of Route 4. He sat behind the wooden counter on a stool, a *Union-Leader* in his hands. The counter held the cash register and some packaged candy and cookies. Coolers flanked both sides of the counter, chilling beer, soda, milk, and fruit juice. Off to the left were racks of chips and pretzels, and to the right was what Brad called his "junk corner"—more rakes, shovels, jumper cables, inflatable water cushions, maps, and the like.

He turned a page of the newspaper, the hot July afternoon wind tugging at it some. Business was worse than he could ever remember it.

He glanced down below the counter, where he kept a few receipts, a lot of bills, and his old Army .45, one of the few things Dad had left him before coughing out his lungs at the Veterans Hospital in Vermont. The pistol was clean. He was sure of that, cleaning it every day as he did. Just in case.

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Ever since that damned Interstate extended itself thirty miles last summer, the tourists who had streamed along Route 4, heading to Palmer Lake, now kept on going up the Interstate and hardly came by any more. Brad had timed it once, driving up the Interstate in his rusty Ford pickup, going past the Route 4 exit at Purmort and on to the lake. Going directly up the Interstate saved ten minutes for those tourists coming up from Massachusetts, ten lousy minutes. Goddamned government, spending all those millions so sweaty tourists could save ten minutes and Brad Poole could be ground into the dirt. It wasn't fair.

But then again, nothing much *was*. Which was why he kept the pistol handy. After all, he was pretty much alone out here. Who knew what might happen if a certain car pulled up?

The air-hose bells out front rang and he looked up expectantly from the paper. He rubbed at his thinning black hair, put on his glasses, and ambled outside.

The sun was hot on his back and he remembered all the tourists that had come through before the Interstate was finished, buying out his beer and chips, making the cash register sing. They'd be dressed funny, the guys in shorts, showing off their hairy legs, a lot of them not bothering with shirts. And the gals—hell, what they wore made him blush most of the time.

The car at the pumps was a dull-yellow Buick, hubcaps missing, a Purmort dump sticker on the windshield. A woman was driving and in the back seat in a jumble of blankets and toys, three kids were squabbling.

"What'll it be?" Brad asked.

The woman, her long black hair greasy-looking, said, "Two, Mr. Poole."

As he undid the gas lid, he remembered the woman—Jackie Dow, one of the Dows from up on Summer Ridge. Married the no-mind Mark Goodson, who worked when he had to and drank whenever he could. Now, you want to talk fair, he remembered Jackie being chosen Miss Wentworth County some summers ago, and now here she was, with scared-rabbit eyes in a doughy face and three brats screaming in her ear.

Pumping from the no-lead side, he filled her tank with four dollars' worth of gas, then took her two singles and walked back to the store. Behind him, he heard it take six tries for the car to start, then saw it fumble off in a blue cloud of exhaust. He went back up the steps to the front porch, under the sign that said ROUTE FOUR GEN-

ERAL STORE, and went back to his stool and his newspaper. He didn't bother ringing up the sale on the register. He was already a month and a half behind in paying the fuel company.

The afternoon dragged on. Occasionally a car or truck droned by, but none stopped. It's the empty lot, he thought. People were scared to stop off at an empty store. They felt better if they saw a couple of cars outside, other customers around. He wasn't sure why it was like that, but it was. He took off his glasses and rubbed them clean with his handkerchief. He couldn't understand why anyone would be fearful of stopping at his store.

In the paper he saw a couple of stories that made his blood boil. One was about the government spending six million dollars on some dam over in Maine. A small dam, barely big enough to do the job, and here in the story some experts said that by the time the government finished building that dam it would be worthless, anyway. Six million dollars. If he could have just one-hundredth—hell, one-thousandth—of that, he'd be set. He'd no longer have to worry about the cars not stopping or about the bills or the pink notices piling up in his post-office box. He wouldn't even have to worry about the pistol.

He rubbed at his eyes. The afternoon sun was starting to stream into the store, lighting up the uneven wooden planks on the floor, highlighting the grease spots on the wall. What a place. The only job he ever knew, ever since old man Dumont took him on before he croaked. It had begun to come together for a time, before those yellow machines came in, noisily digging up the dirt, tearing out his life.

A truck pulled into the dirt lot and Brad felt like burrowing his head in the newspaper when the truck came to a stop. The snack man. He was a young pup of about twenty, swaggering up the steps in his brown uniform pants and vest with the cartons of popcorn, chips, and pretzels. Last summer he'd come in and shoot the breeze while pulling off the dated bags and putting up the new stuff, and if he was ahead of schedule he'd pop a bottle of Coke and sit on the porch with Brad and talk women and politics, two of the best talking subjects ever invented.

But that was last summer.

The boy came in, glanced at him once, and then set down the boxes and started replacing the bags of snacks silently. Brad pretended to read the *Union-Leader's* travel section. When the boy was

done, he came over and dropped his slip on the counter. As he walked out, carrying the dated snacks, Brad dropped the bill into the open shoebox at the bottom of the counter with the rest, not bothering to look at it. One of these days, probably pretty soon at that, the kid would come in with empty boxes and leave with every snack in the store.

With the afternoon sun setting down toward Vermont, it got hotter instead of cooler, and the wind died down. Sweat trickled down Brad's neck and back and he stepped out onto the porch to try to get a stray breeze. He blinked at the sun's glare. It sure was hot. He folded his arms and looked down the empty road as it curved around the corner, heading out to the old exit by the Interstate. The heat made the air over the road shimmer in queasy waves.

Closer down the road, a group of black crows swooped down and started hopping around, poking at whatever road kill was on the gravel. Not many ways to go, Brad thought. He could put the place up for sale, but even if he could get someone to buy it, what would he do after that? Work like those guys he went to high school with, bagging groceries at Mountain Mart and acting grateful for a fifty-cent tip?

He remembered a movie on television one night last winter, watching it from Dad's old rocking chair upstairs with a down comforter wrapped around him and the woodstove chugging out a little heat. It was about a businessman who was losing money at his garment factory and was thinking about burning the place down for the insurance money. Brad couldn't remember how the movie ended, but right now he didn't care.

Down in the cellar was enough junk and newspapers and the like—well, if it happened, he was sure the Purmort Volunteer Fire Department would poke around and blame it on faulty wiring. The insurance was paid up, he was pretty sure of that.

Down cellar. It would be easy. He turned and looked at the store, catching a bit of a reflection from the front windows. After Hurricane Dennis had blasted through last summer, he'd had to replace both front windows. Up on the roof was the shingling job he'd done a few years back. How hot those asphalt shingles had been, sticking to his hands and wrists and clothes. Up there he'd been able to see a glimmer of water on the horizon that marked Palmer Lake.

He stamped his feet a couple of times, like a nervous horse waiting to gallop away from something. Damn it, he had sweated too long and even bled a few times for the store, sawing wood and the like—he

wasn't going to torch it like some common criminal—no, sir, even if the fire insurance was there. What he needed was debt insurance.

He heard a faint squeak-squeak. A boy on a bicycle was coming this way, and he watched as the boy rolled the bike to a stop and leaned it against the base of the porch—he looked to be about ten or eleven. He wore jeans with knee patches on them, dirty sneakers, and a white T-shirt knotted around his thin waist. His hair was light brown and cut short, and he squinted up at Brad from the gravel lot. "You open, mister?"

"Sure am."

"Then how come you're not in your store, working?"

Brad tried not to smile. "I was workin' hard all day. You just caught me taking a break."

He walked into the store, the boy climbing the stairs and following him. "You from near here?" Brad asked.

"Yeah, I live with my mom up on Orleans Street."

"What's her name?"

"Sullivan. Mine's Bernie."

"Good to meet you, Bernie." The boy's mother must be Alicia Sullivan—she was a couple of years ahead of him in grammar school, but her name back then was Alicia Stoneham. Long blonde hair, always getting in trouble.

The boy came to the counter, a cold can of Mountain Dew beading sweat in his dirty hands. He put the can down, reached into his jeans pocket, and dropped some coins on the counter. Brad counted them as they fell. Forty-three cents.

"That all you got?" he asked softly.

Bernie nodded his head.

"The drink's sixty cents, you know."

Bernie bit his lower lip. "It sure is hot out there," he said.

"It sure is," Brad agreed. "Here." From his shirt pocket, he took out a pen—Bank With Us At BankUs, it said—and tearing off a piece of register tape, he wrote: I.O.U. seventeen cents, B. Sullivan. He slid the piece of paper across to the boy.

"This here's an I.O.U.," Brad said. "You get yourself seventeen cents the next few days, then you come back and pay me. But make sure you do, now, 'cause I know where Orleans Street is, and where to find you if you don't pay me back."

The boy nodded seriously and picked up his can and the piece of paper and ran out of the store. Take care of yourself, boy, Brad

thought. Some years from now you'll wish all you had to worry about was a seventeen-cent debt.

It got near six o'clock, his usual closing time, and Brad went back out on the porch again. The Sullivan boy had been the last of the traffic and he folded his arms again, wondering, as he did all the time now, if he'd be here next summer. And if not here, where? This was the only place he knew, and sometimes, like now, when he was hot and his head was throbbing with a headache, he knew he'd do almost anything to keep the store going.

He was going to close up and head in for his usual late-afternoon beer when a bright-blue pickup truck rounded the corner and slowed down. It had Massachusetts plates and Brad almost grinned with pleasure as it rolled up to the gas pumps. A man and a woman were in the cab and the woman had a map in her hands. Some tourists that had slipped off the Interstate. He felt like giving the man a free tank of gas just for doing that.

In the bed of the truck was an inflated yellow life raft, tied down. The young man stepped out, dressed in sandals, khaki shorts, and a T-shirt that said SIMMONS in blue lettering. He had a thick brown moustache that matched the color of his hair. "Afternoon," the man said. "Fill it up, will you?"

Brad went around to the passenger side, where the woman sat. She was about the same age as the young man and she was fiddling with an expensive-looking camera in her lap, the map set aside for the moment. She was blonde and wore big sunglasses, and had on white shorts and a black bikini top. He tried not to stare as he went by, but he noticed a gold chain around her neck. A chain like that would bring some good money over at Earl's Gold and Silver.

The gas cap came off slowly, his hand trembling with the effort, and he spilled some gasoline on his work boots as he put the nozzle in. The fumes made his eyes ache. He tried to watch the rolling numbers through the cracked glass of the pump, but his gaze kept returning to the woman in the front seat. His mouth was dry, and he glanced up the road some. All alone, except for those damn crows.

The pickup took a little over ten gallons and Brad went back into the store. The young man was by the counter, two cases of Michelob beer and three bags of potato chips on the counter before him. The sight was wonderful. Look at me, Brad thought, I'm all excited about this man and his girl coming in here and spending money. Last summer they would've been only two more faces in the crowd. Just

like those two that came by three weeks ago. How times change. He started ringing up the register.

"That'll come to twenty-nine fifty," Brad said.

"Right." The man pulled out a wallet. "And no sales tax, right?"

"That's right."

The man's wallet was fat and his nimble fingers skimmed across a thick sheaf of bills before pulling out a ten and twenty. "Here you go," he said, handing over the money. "And keep the change—I hate carrying all that silver around."

Brad carefully put the bills in the register. "Where you headed for?"

The man piled the chips on the two cases. "Palmer Lake. A cousin of mine gave me directions to the lake, said it was right at the Purmort exit. Thing I can't figure out is that the Interstate keeps on going. My cousin said it gave out right after Purmort."

"Your cousin was right, up until last summer. Now the Interstate keeps on right to Palmer Lake."

The young man looked at his watch. "Damn. We were late as it was." As he picked up the beer and chips, Brad placed both hands on the counter and stared down at the wide planks of the flooring.

"I know a shortcut," he said. "It's kinda complicated to describe, but I was starting to head up that way when you came by."

"A shortcut? You sure?"

"Sure as truth," Brad said, wiping his hands on his pants. "Comes in on the other side of Palmer Lake, heads out by an abandoned quarry. You can follow me if you'd like."

The man's moustache curled up with his grin. "That's great. I'd really appreciate it."

Brad said, "No problem at all. Just give me a minute or two to close up."

With the beer and chips in his arms, the man went out to the truck and slid the load into the bed, then clambered up into the cab and waited. Out on the porch, Brad dragged in the sacks of fertilizer and potatoes, and then took down the rakes that propped the door open. He went back to the register, totalled it up, and then locked it. Almost as an afterthought, as he started toward the front door, he reached under the counter, brought out his pistol, and tucked it into his waistband under his shirt.

The air seemed cooler and his headache was gone as he approached the front door, keys jingling in his hands. Lord, he thought, the things we have to do.

a **NEW** short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

All Morgan Kinney wanted was to have his own appearance. But that was impossible as long as he had Curt Woodward's appearance. It was illogical to say the famous actor had stolen Kinney's individuality when Woodward had come along first, yet that was how it felt—and lately Kinney's resentment scarcely left him for a minute . . .

STOLEN CAREERS

by **WILLIAM BANKIER**

Morgan Kinney's uniform did not make him brave. He hesitated when he saw a tourist getting ready to intercept him. He would have to answer the question yet again before he could walk out of Nedro's Sports Emporium and keep his date with Barbie Lime.

"Are you Curt Woodward?" She was old enough to know better—at least forty-five in her pricy linen suit. She came to her senses as Kinney forced a grin. "I'm sorry, that can't be right. Curt Woodward must be my age. That guard uniform makes you look like him when he was in *Sanders*. Are you his son?"

"No relation," Kinney said, feeling as embarrassed as ever. "But you aren't the first to think so."

The encounter would give the L.A. visitor something to talk about back home. Kinney's face was a copy of the famous Curt Woodward face. All of Kinney's expressions were vintage Woodward—except for the haunted look.

By the time he made it on foot through three blocks of Beverly Hills traffic to Donut City, Barbie was waiting outside. She had changed from her uniform into a T-shirt, short pleated skirt, tennis shoes, and ankle sox—all pink. It was a teenager outfit from a gen-

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eration ago and it looked sexy on this thirty-year-old honey blonde. Kinney came crashing up on his metal heels.

"You could have changed," Barbie said. "I would have waited."

He looked at his reflection in the restaurant window. Dark-blue cotton covered a rangy, six-foot frame. The peaked cap was dead center over the famous narrowed eyes. The nightstick at his belt reached halfway down his leg. "My clothes are at home," he said. "I wanted to get here."

"You're always bitching about being taken for Curt Woodward and yet you walk around in a cop outfit from Central Casting."

They went for something to eat. Then they went to a film. It was two different things, Kinney realized. He could put up with the heads turning as he walked by, but when somebody buttonholed him it was a bummer. Denying he was the movie star somehow made him feel like a failure.

After the movie, he went with Barbie to her place, parking his car behind hers in the driveway outside the apartment building in West L.A. They went inside and the uniform was discarded at last. Later, holding her in his arms, half asleep, he said, "I wonder if it's true."

"If what is?"

"If Curt Woodward is my father."

"You're joking."

"I never saw my father. My mother says he ran off when I was a baby—went back East and died. But what's the truth?"

Barbie rolled away, adopting her sleeping position. "The truth is," she sighed, "you've finally lost your marbles."

"Maybe." Kinney's hands were behind his head, his eyes wide open in the dark. "But I think I'll drive on up to Santa Barbara and ask her."

He asked Abe Nedro for a few days off. "You got it," the boss said. He was head-and-shoulders shorter than the young security guard but twice as wide. He was glowing after a session pumping iron at the gym. "What's your problem?"

"No problem."

"You're a twisted kid," Nedro told him amiably. "Half the guys in Southern California would kill to look like you."

"That's not what I want."

"Whatever you want, you better go for it." The boss aimed a finger.

"Because that famous face—one day you'll look for it in the mirror and it won't be there."

So Morgan buckled himself into his old Dodge Swinger, bought \$15.00 worth of full serve at the neighborhood Arco, drove down Sunset Boulevard to the Pacific Coast Highway, hung a right, and headed north. Along much of the road to Santa Barbara, the ocean kept him company. The sight of surfers off Topanga Beach reminded him of his days in a wet-suit, balanced on his board, trying to get something out of a wave that was never there. Barbie Lime was better at it than he was. She still went to the beach when she wasn't attending acting classes or aerobics or taking part in a Showcase for some casting director who was only along for the free lunch. Barbie knew what she wanted: she was going to get paid for acting.

All Kinney wanted was to have his own appearance. But that was impossible as long as he had Curt Woodward's appearance. It was illogical to say the famous actor had stolen Morgan Kinney's individuality when Woodward had come along first—yet that was how it felt—and lately Kinney's resentment scarcely left him for a minute.

The next twelve exits were for Santa Barbara. Kinney came off the highway at State Street and turned right, away from the wharf and the Pacific, and drove on up into town. Cruising slowly, he let himself be irradiated by affluence. Even the winos hanging around the Spanish cinema looked less desperate than drunks in other cities.

Kinney found parking near the dental office. It was only three o'clock, Bella would still be at work. He drew satisfaction from walking in on her without warning, catching her being herself, watching her struggle to shift gears and assume the role of his mother.

"Morgan! Darling! Wait! Hello! Sit down!" She pushed a button on the telephone, putting her caller on hold. Bella Kinney remained one of the prettier fifty-year-olds in town. The pharmacist came out of his pharmacy when she walked in to buy pantyhose. The cinema manager in his glass cage craned his neck to catch a glimpse of those pony legs when she teetered past in old-fashioned three-inch heels.

"Relax, Mother. I came in to tell you I'll be home for supper. Haven't you always wanted me to let you know I'll be home for supper?"

"Come here, give us a kiss. Look at you—you've lost weight."

"Can we talk? Are you alone tonight?"

"Of course we can talk. About what?"

"If Roy is going to be there—"

"He doesn't have to be. You and I can have a cozy supper, like the good old days."

"I must have missed those."

"I'll fry hamburger with rice. Lots of onions, the way you like it."

"Tell him," Kinney said.

"Who?"

Kinney pointed at the hold button. "Tell Roy he's to stay away."

Bella made a face. She put the telephone to her ear and punched the button. "Roy?" She listened. "Roy? Damn, he hung up."

Kinney bought a bottle of screw-cap wine. He drove to the beach and went walking on sand with the bottle in a canvas shoulder bag. Late afternoon, middle of the week, month of April, there weren't many people in sight. He found a sun-trap in a curve of the cliff and made himself comfortable. The red wine was dry and went down just fine.

Maybe he should have gone to college. His grades were never good enough because he was too busy playing to crack a book. His ability at basketball and baseball probably would have gained him a sports scholarship had he been willing to train, but it was hard work, the running and lifting weights. You had to keep doing it.

So he moved down to Los Angeles when he turned twenty-one. That was seven years ago. Kinney shivered and swallowed more wine. No problem getting work. He waited tables at first. But that was a pain in the butt, with all the running and carrying and people never satisfied. Working as an extra in films was easier, but it was boring. And you had to keep telephoning the agency to find out if there was work tomorrow. And the line was always busy.

Kinney had dreamed he would be discovered on some movie location and would become a star. But with him, it worked the other way around. Because he was a Curt Woodward lookalike, the assistant director always positioned him out of shot—they couldn't film a scene and have what looked like the famous Curt Woodward lounging around in the background.

So the star had got there first. And Morgan was robbed of his chance to make it on his own merits.

It was time to go and eat with Bella. Kinney drank the last of the wine, then he stood up—not too unsteadily because he could hold his alcohol. He swung the empty bottle against a rock, shattering it. Carefully, he picked up the larger shards of glass one at a time

and threw them far out onto the beach in different directions. Let some sucker spike his foot.

Then, sick of himself, he patrolled the sand, collecting the glass daggers and carrying them to a rubbish bin.

When he reached his mother's apartment on Sierra Bonita, Roy Riff was already there. Morgan could smell the stink of his cheap cigar. Bella came running out of the kitchen to head off her son at the hall-tree.

"I couldn't get back to him on the telephone," she explained, wide-eyed with excitement.

"I should skate right on out of here," Kinney said. But he went into the living room because he was ready to have a fight with somebody. *In vino, aggro.*

"Hey, the Prodigal Nerd." Roy Riff was in his clothes from the construction site. But his hands and face were scrubbed, his red neck gleamed, and his dusty boots were placed evenly on each side of the television set like rocks around a flower bed. "What brings you up here?"

"L.A. smog is starting to smell good," Kinney said. "I thought I'd come back and get a whiff of your stogie."

"When does your movie come out?" Riff asked. He knew about Kinney's problem as a Woodward double. "I got the answer for you," he said. "Plastic surgery. Have them make you look like Daffy Duck. You could work in cartoons."

"Come to the table," Bella called, coming from the kitchen with food.

Weaving his way across the room, Kinney said, "I drove past that building you guys put up last year. It's falling apart. You'd better start using real cement."

As Riff sat down, he winked at Kinney's flushed face. "Nice of your son to buy the wine," he told Bella. "Too bad he drank it."

The dinner argument ended in stalemate. They shifted to the living room, where a television sitcom added a dimension of hysteria. Bella got up and down, pouring coffee, making another pot. For the second time, Kinney said, "I wish I could get a few minutes to talk to my mother."

Bella glanced at her watch. She said, "Roy, maybe you could slide over to the Blue Room and I'll join you there in an hour."

The construction worker laced his boots with exact movements

and left slowly. In the doorway, he said, "Someday you're going to sass a person who isn't your mother's friend—and get taught some manners."

When they were alone, Bella said, "Now what?"

"I want an answer from you."

"What's the question?"

Kinney took a breath. "Is Curt Woodward my real father?"

Bella was so astonished she switched off the TV. "Come again, sweetie?"

"I want to know. I look just like him. Everybody says so. People in the store come over and ask me every day."

Bella threw up her hands. "I've never been in the same city with the man, as far as I know. Your father left me before you were born. I told you. He went back East."

"How can I be sure?" Kinney accused her.

"Me and Curt Woodward? It's bizarre."

"It's possible. Back before he made it in *Sanders*. He was just another actor."

"I don't even like actors."

"Maybe that's why you don't like me. You prefer dummies who carry boards."

"See a psychiatrist, Morgan. I'll pay for it."

Kinney's rage poured out of him. "I need a life!" he said, using both hands to clutch the air in front of his mother's face. "Where's my individuality? Stolen! And what am I supposed to do about it?"

Abe Nedro advised him to exercise. "Work out your frustrations in the gym. You can meet nice girls there. Nice guys."

"I've got a girl," Kinney said. He left his boss in the stockroom counting track suits. He wandered the length of the store and posed by the front window. Ladies who looked like Iowa put their heads together and he heard the familiar hiss: "It's him!"

Nedro followed him to impart a further word of encouragement. "Relax," he said. "Woodward, today, wishes he looked like you. His face is a mess. I saw photographs. Time has not been kind."

That was the moment when Kinney decided to go and see Woodward for himself. He mulled it over during the day, then he tried it out on Barbie when they met that night at Dodger Stadium. Barbie was a Cardinals fan, and St. Louis was in town. They lined up for hot dogs and beer, then went back to their seats behind third base. The Cards were playing exciting baseball, getting on base, stealing

second. They were bunting and squeezing a run home. The Dodgers plodded through the innings, a Triple-A ballteam trapped in the major leagues. They were doing well just to get three men out.

"I'm going to go see Woodward," Kinney said.

"What for?"

"Let him understand my problem."

"He won't care. What's he supposed to do?"

"I don't know. But he has to see me." A foul ball arced into the stands. After the commotion settled down, Kinney said, "But I don't know where he lives."

"That's easy," Barbie said. "I took a tour last year. I bought a map of the stars' homes."

They left the game early and drove back to Barbie's place. Head to head at the dining-room table, drinking wine, they went over her map. Curt Woodward's house was on Sunset Boulevard. "But you'll never get in," she said.

"I can try."

"Anyway, he won't be there. He'll be on location someplace. Or in Switzerland. Or Vegas."

Kinney made up his mind. "Do you want to come with me?"

"And get laughed at? No way, José."

Kinney finished his wine. He would go home and change into his uniform. Why? Because it felt right, showing up at Woodward's door dressed like Woodward himself as he had appeared in *Sanders* and the sequels. Besides, security men watching the place would react better to a visiting guard.

"Last chance for glory," he told Barbie on his way out.

"I'll read about you in the papers," she said.

There was an iron gate, but it was open so it was easy to drive in from Sunset onto the Woodward courtyard, where a limo and a Bentley were parked. Kinney's old Dodge crept in between them and lay down. The guard who came to face him was in a chauffeur's uniform. He looked tough, but he was old—maybe a retired cop.

Kinney did his slow swagger. The badge on his dark-blue shirt gleamed in the spotlights ringing the house. "Evening," he said. "I'm Morgan Kinney."

The guard had a powdery-pink face and eyes that had seen a lot. But this was exceptional. "I'll be go to hell," he said.

Kinney knew he was in. "I've come to let Mr. Woodward have a look at me."

"It's uncanny."

"Think the man might let me say hello?"

The guard said, "I'll have to frisk you." When he had, he looked at his watch. It was close to midnight. "They're drinking by the pool," he said. "Follow me."

There were lights under the water. Poolside, it was shadowy and cool. A Doberman got up and faced the newcomers. The chauffeur said, "Look what I found outside, Mr. Woodward."

Abe Nedro had been right about the actor's face. Kinney might not have recognized Woodward in a crowd. He was sitting in a director's chair between another man and a girl sprawled on loungers. "Sit," he told the dog. It sat. "Come over in the light, son."

Kinney came forward and said, "I'm sorry to barge in. I know I've no right." Instinct told him to brazen it out. "But, damn it, I have to go around with this face—and everybody thinks I'm you. It's a pain in the ass."

Woodward's companions broke up. The woman was Myrene Malone, co-star in Woodward's latest film. She was boyish in cropped yellow hair. The man dressed in denim was one of the mature shaved-heads who throng Hollywood, bursting with energy and menace. He said, "The kid is incredible. I mean, I know I'm drunk, but the kid is incredible."

Kinney introduced himself. Woodward said who Myrene Malone was and that the baldie was his no-talent writer, Huddy Parker. He commanded a drink for their young visitor and the actress went to get it from a table on wheels. The chauffeur went back on guard duty.

Kinney was brimming with pleasure. He sat on a wicker chair and sipped his drink. The air was ripe with the scent of jasmine and there was the self-conscious feeling of rich people trying to own the night.

They let the newcomer rattle on. He must have chattered for half an hour about his job, his girl, his mother. He decided not to mention the paternity theory.

Santa Barbara got a response from Woodward, who had been up there golfing with the President. They were using Kinney as an exhibit, or a mildly diverting program discovered while channel-hopping. He began to sense this and it annoyed him, though his depression had lifted. He wasn't missing very much. These people were desperate. His fun at the ballgame with Barbie was something

they could only imagine. And Woodward himself was a faded fifty with most of his joy behind him.

"So I guess I'll drink up and go," Kinney said. "Thanks for being so understanding."

Parker, the plot-wise writer, was the one who put a stop to that. "Don't rush away," he said. "Have another drink."

"I'll have to use your bathroom first."

"Show him where it is," Woodward told Myrene.

The actress led Kinney along a path through a small jungle. They came to a conservatory with a glass door hanging open. "It's in there." She came up to his armpit. Looking down on her fuzzy head, Kinney thought of kids in the schoolyard. On screen, she was always coming out of smoke and purple light on a blast of hard-core music. "You're in the wrong place," she said.

He peered through the doorway, saw another door, and, beyond it, plumbing fixtures.

She said, "I mean those two beside the pool. You're a nice boy. Drink your drink and go home."

By the time she rejoined the men, Parker had given birth to his idea. It was an ugly little thing, but it seethed with a life of its own. "Dig this," he told the actress. "You know how Lou Catalan has been threatening Curt."

"Catalan is capable of anything," Woodward said.

Myrene knew the story. Lou Catalan had played a small role in *Sanders*, the first big hit in Woodward's cop series. Catalan was good—so good he almost stole the picture. Woodward solved the problem of competing with Catalan in the sequels by having an additional scene shot for the original film. In it, the Catalan character died in a gas explosion.

Catalan was convinced this premeditated murder altered his career. He was probably right. *Sanders II* and *Sanders III* were made without him. He never had such an opportunity again.

Now Myrene asked, "Can't you tell the police he's threatening you?"

"They can't act unless he does something." Woodward looked nervous. "He called me last week. The guy is drunk all the time. He may be on other things as well. He said he hasn't got much to live for, and when he goes we go as a team."

"So here's my plan," Parker said. "We send this kid over to visit Catalan—tonight, in his cop uniform, looking like Curt in the movie.

But first I go inside and telephone the man to make sure he's there, and to tell him Woodward has had this fantastic plastic surgery. An incredible job. He looks just like he did twenty years ago."

"And Huddy tells him we're going to be making *Sanders IV*," Woodward added, "no part in it for Lou, of course. He'll rub it in."

"What's the point?" Myrene asked.

"That paranoid loser keeps a gun in his house," the writer said. "When Kinney shows up looking like Woodward, Catalan should blow him away."

"And they'll put Catalan in jail forever." Myrene made a face. "Unless he tops himself with the next bullet."

"You're beautiful," Parker told her. "You can collaborate with me on my next script."

Woodward frowned, revealing a glimmer of his own paranoia. "Let's not forget whose girl this is."

Kinney had no difficulty finding Lou Catalan's house on Cahuenga Boulevard in Old Hollywood. This was more than he could have hoped for, being asked to take part in a practical joke on one of Woodward's actor friends.

The palm-lined street would be depressing in daylight. He could see the stucco houses were rundown, the lawns patchy and dry. Cars as sad as his own were parked on both sides of the street. He drove past the address, saw a light on inside, pulled into the driveway, and cut the engine. All he had to do was ring the doorbell and, when Catalan answered, give him the line Woodward had made famous—"Ready when you are, scum."

They had not allowed him to get sober. Kinney was still buzzing as he crossed the lawn and drifted up onto the porch. There was no bell that he could see. He rattled the screen door with his knuckles.

The inner door opened and, against the light, he saw the rotund shape of a five-footer. The arm not holding the door was pressed against his side. Kinney thought he could make out a gun. His heart began to pound and he forgot his line. "Mr. Catalan?" he said.

"Who the hell are you? You're not Woodward. Come inside, come into the light."

Doing as he was told, Kinney found himself in a littered room that smelled of tobacco and soiled cat litter. He counted four of the animals watching him out of half closed eyes. The television was screening an old movie. Catalan picked up a remote control and the TV went dead.

"What are they trying to do?" he said. His eyes were naked. He put on glasses with heavy rims and his face looked decent. "Do they think you resemble that cold-hearted bastard? You aren't anything like him. Look at your eyes, the expression on your face."

"It's meant to be a gag," Kinney said.

"Is that what they told you?" Catalan set aside the revolver. "Huddy Parker called and wound me up like a cheap watch. You're supposed to be Woodward with plastic surgery. And doing another picture without me. I've been hating that thief for twenty years. He stole my career."

"He stole my face," Kinney said.

They both thought about that. Then they started laughing. "Who are you?" Catalan said. Kinney told him and they sat down wherever there wasn't a cat. As Kinney told his tale of woe, the older man seemed to appreciate exactly what he was going through. He got out beer for both of them.

Eventually, he began to bubble and giggle. "How about this? Woodward tried to play a joke on me. Let's do one on him."

"Like what?"

"Like you came here and we fought and you killed me. Okay? And now you deliver my body back to his door. Okay? Did you ever see the old Cagney film where his mother opens the door and Cagney's corpse falls inside?"

Catalan ran around locating a satchel full of makeup. He did himself proud with bullet holes and bloodstains on his shirtfront. He added gore from the mouth running down his chin. He looked horrific. He found an old pair of glasses, smashed one lens, put on the crazed specs at an angle, and confronted Kinney with his mouth sagging. Kinney didn't know whether to laugh or shout for help.

On the drive back to Sunset Boulevard, Kinney said, "How will we get in? The guard passed me earlier, but they're supposed to be afraid of you."

"I know all his guards," Catalan said. "And they know me. They're retired studio cops."

It was true. The chauffeur with the powdery face took one look and covered his mouth with a fist. "That's a great effect, Mr. Catalan."

"Can we go up?" the actor asked respectfully. "We're playing a little joke on Curt."

"They're all asleep."

"Couldn't be better."

The chauffeur went back to nap in the limo. Catalan, who knew his way, led Kinney into the house and up a flight of carpeted stairs. They crept along a corridor, passing a mirror that threw back a shocking image. Catalan paused with Kinney looming behind him. "You'll dine out on this one for a year," the actor whispered.

They came to the door of Woodward's bedroom. "Let me get set, then knock hard," Catalan said. He stood with his face as close as possible to the panel, pressed his arms to his sides, lifted his chin, and went rigid. "Now," he groaned through clenched teeth.

Kinney reached over and knocked hard. There was movement from the room. He knocked again. "What?" Woodward's voice sounded sleepy. Kinney knocked a third time. Now there were words of complaint, getting closer. Kinney ducked around the corner.

He heard the door swing open. There was a pause, then a startled cry—"What the hell?" The thudding noise had to be Catalan falling inward and hitting the floor. Kinney shifted in the darkened hallway to where he could see inside the bedroom. Catalan was stiff on his face on the carpet, Woodward at the bedside table, fumbling in a drawer, finding a gun. "The kid is in the house," he was whimpering. "The kid is in the house!"

Now he burst out of the room and down the hall. Kinney was terrified. He was frozen. The man might do anything. Catalan was sitting up, wheezing into his hands. "Did you see that?"

"He's panicked," Kinney whispered. "He's got a gun!"

They heard voices raised in a room down the hall. Woodward was yelling. Myrene Malone sounded as if she was defending herself. Huddy Parker's shout was urgent. "Curt, wait!"

"We better get down there," Catalan said at the same time as the gun went off. "Sounds like our little prank is out of control."

Kinney followed the actor. They arrived in a bedroom doorway. Huddy Parker was sprawled halfway out of bed, looking a lot deader than Catalan for all his Grand Guignol makeup. Myrene, naked but swathed in a sheet, was partly concealed behind a chair. Woodward was confronting her, the legendary smoking revolver in his hand.

"Curt, it was only a joke," Catalan said. "What have you done?"

Woodward's eyes were everywhere at once. He said, "She was in bed with that bum! She told me she had a headache!"

Myrene was regaining her composure. She said, "You'd better get rid of that gun. You have to think of a scenario before the guard gets here."

"He's already here," the chauffeur said from the hallway. He was carrying a submachine gun and his powdery face looked like the cop he used to be. "I'll take that weapon, Mr. Woodward."

"Everything is Parker's fault," Woodward said. "It was his idea to send the kid to your place, Lou. And then he takes my woman to bed."

"Yes, but he's dead," Myrene said. "And you're going to prison." Like a survivor darting out of a burning building, she placed herself close to Morgan Kinney. "Looks good for you," she said. "After this publicity, the studios will want somebody who looks like Curt Woodward."

Kinney turned his back on her. He said to Lou Catalan, "Can you help me change my appearance?"

"No problem," the actor said. "You cut your hair and dye it blond. You put on weight and grow a beard. And you stay the hell out of that cop suit."

Kinney imagined himself looking that way. No more Curt Woodward to lean on or to blame. No more recognition in public. It was a scary feeling, as if a part of himself was gone forever. "How about glasses?" he said. "Could we find me a pair like yours?"

"Q"

ON OUR COVER

Liv Ullmann, described in *The Film Encyclopedia* as an "outstanding dramatic actress of international films whose splendidly expressive face and subtle acting have figured prominently in several Ingmar Bergman productions," has also appeared on Broadway and the European stage. Her autobiography, *Changing*, was published in 1977 and that same year she was the subject of a feature-length documentary film. She is very active in her present role as goodwill UNICEF ambassador. She has been a fan of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* since she was a teenager in Norway.

THE JURY BOX

by ALLEN J. HUBIN

A theme explored relatively infrequently in mystery fiction is that of evil in children. Perhaps this is uncomfortable territory for us, this finding of depravity where we think only innocence should abound, and so readers and writers mostly take their attentions elsewhere.

Undeterred, B. M. Gill offers *Nursery Crimes* (Scribners, \$15.95). It's wartime in England, and Clare and Graham Moncrief, no paragons of morality they, have done a sort of duty and taken two war orphans into their home, a four-year-old boy and his seven-year-old sister. They join the Moncriefs' own daughter, the beautiful Zanny. The boy is Zanny's first victim. Her parents, knowing, excuse their knowledge, years pass, and Zanny's angelic face and casual corruption continue to take their deadly toll. A telling portrait, with a most startling finale.

The seventh of Loren D. Estleman's high-grade novels about Detroit private eye Amos Walker is *Lady Yesterday* (Houghton Mifflin, \$15.95). This lady, earlier also a lady of the night Amos had known, if not in the biblical sense, returns to Detroit looking for her father. She has also attracted the attentions of a killer, and following these trails leads Walker to the organized-crime underbelly of the city. Here's a stylish panoply of the gritty, witty, and poignant.

William G. Tapply has another winner in *Dead Meat* (Scribners, \$14.95), his fifth novel about Boston attorney Brady Coyne. Here the action takes place on isolated Raven Lake, in Maine near the Canadian border. The fishing is incredible, access is mostly by plane, and the Raven Lake Lodge caters to those with huge amounts of money and a desire for luxurious frontier living. A good business, the Lodge is. Or was. Local Indians are threatening a lawsuit and trying to take over the whole area because of a burial site near the lake. And a guest has just unaccountably gone missing. A Coyne client owns the place and asks Brady to have a look into both matters. As usual, Tapply dishes up fluid writing and sensitive interplay of characters, with excellent suspense against the vividly portrayed Maine wilderness.

Harold Adams continues to explore 1930s small-town South Dakota in *The Barbed Wire Moose* (The Mysterious Press, \$15.95). Carl Wilcox, whose morals are no better than they have to be and whose colorful history includes prison, is certainly no likely candidate for lawman. But when someone hangs old Carl Foote over a rafters with barbed wire and Corden's only cop comes down sick, Wilcox is nominated. Snowy arctic winter has its grip firmly on the plains, which only has the advan-

tage that undiscovered corpses keep better. Foote's is not the only one of these around, and Wilcox tries to figure out how the entangled relationships of an undistinguished old duffer could give rise to so much killing. Very effective.

Boston professor of law Jeremiah Healy provides his third account of Boston private investigator John Francis Cuddy in *So Like Sleep* (Harper & Row, \$15.95). This features polished prose, complex and intriguing dynamics, and a good puzzle. Cuddy is asked for a favor by a cop: look into an open-and-shut murder case. Jennifer Creasey, white and promiscuous, was shot; William Daniels, boyfriend, black and brilliant, produced the gun and a confession in front of multiple witnesses. The confession he emphatically repeats to Cuddy. So what's to do? Just to complete the favor, Cuddy talks to the folks involved: members of the counseling group to which Daniels and Creasey belonged, their therapists, parents of victim and accused, cops, school officials. And a seed of doubt begins to grow in Cuddy's mind . . .

Teri White's *Max Trueblood and the Jersey Desperado* (The Mysterious Press, \$15.95) surprised me. Trueblood is a retired freelance mob hitman, and I was not prepared to be sympathetic to such a protagonist or his antics. But such is White's skill that the story and its chief characters come across as fresh and likeable. Max agrees to come out of retirement to dispatch a noted crime figure. At the same time, another hood hires up-and-coming young assassin Jeremiah

Donahue to dispatch Max. Then Trueblood takes Donahue on as an apprentice, befriending him. Donahue has never experienced friendship before. And Max is the person he's supposed to kill, to earn his stripes. The story rolls on, till all the baddest guys want Max dead. In the middle is elderly New York cop Aaron Temple, who's devoted a lifetime to liking Max and trying to put him behind bars forever.

Little attention seems to be paid these days to Margery Allingham (1904–1966) and her criminous writings—it's been a long time since a reprint came to my attention. This is a great pity. But take heart, for B. A. Pike, in *Campion's Career: A Study of the Novels of Margery Allingham* (Popular Press, \$26.95 cloth, \$13.95 paper) has produced an affectionate, beautifully written, and intensely knowledgeable account of Allingham's fictions. His particular focus is on Albert Campion, Allingham's chief series protagonist and one of the most enjoyable such characters in all mystery fiction. Pike examines each of Campion's appearances in great detail, tracing change and development. He includes a comprehensive Allingham bibliography, in so doing identifying for the first time publicly a pseudonym—Maxwell March—Allingham used for crime novels in the 1930s.

A rich harvest of fine criminous reprints is also available. Many are from 1986, but (as noted below) earlier years are very well represented.

From Bantam, *A Dark-Adapted*

Eye by Barbara Vine (Ruth Rendell), \$3.95, and *Death in the Morning* (1978) and *Fate Worse Than Death* by Sheila Radley, \$3.50 and \$2.95, respectively. From Penguin, Edmund Crispin's *Beware of the Trains* (1953) and *Frequent Hearses* (1950), John Bingham's *Five Roundabouts to Heaven* (1953), and Julian Symons' *The Narrowing Circle* (1954), all in the Classic Crime series, \$5.95 each—plus, at \$3.95 each, *Saratoga Snapper* by Stephen Dobyns, *The Paper Thunderbolt* (1951) and *A Comedy of Terrors* (1940) by Michael Innes, *Late Payments* by Michael Z. Lewin, *Under a Monsoon Cloud* by H. R. F. Keating, and *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* by George V. Higgins (1971). From Berkley, *Ask a Policeman*, a 1933 novel by members of England's Detection Club (\$3.50). From Perennial, Timothy Fuller's *Keep Cool, Mr. Jones* (1950), Michael Gilbert's *Flash Point* (1974), Michael Underwood's *Hand of Fate* (1981), and William Krasner's *The Gambler* (1950), at \$3.95 each. From Collier, at \$3.95, *Journey to the Hangman*

(1959) and *An Author Bites the Dust* (1948) by Arthur W. Upfield. From Dell, Robert B. Parker's *The Judas Goat* (1978), Robert Barnard's *Political Suicide*, Jonathan Valin's *Life's Work*, and Martha Grimes' *I Am the Only Running Footman* (\$3.95 each). From Academy, *He Ran All the Way* (1947) by Sam Ross (\$4.95). From The Mysterious Press, *Inward Journey* (1984), reflections on Ross Macdonald by 25 other writers, edited by Ralph B. Sipper, and Robert Barnard's 1980 appreciation of Agatha Christie, *A Talent To Deceive* (\$8.95 each), plus Ed McBain's *Cinderella*, Anthony Price's *October Men* (1973), Doug Hornig's *The Dark Side*, Loren D. Estleman's *Any Man's Death*, and Ross Thomas' 1969 novel, *The Singapore Wink* (\$3.95 each). And, in Dodd Mead's hardcover Winterbrook series of Agatha Christie, *Cards on the Table* (1936), *Halloween Party* (1969), *Murder at Hazelmoor* (1931), *They Came to Baghdad* (1951), and *What Mrs. McGillicuddy Saw!* (1957), each \$14.95.

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a **NEW** Jim Quark story by

ROBERT TWOHY

"Quark yelled he'd call a cop?" the writer said. "Sounds naive to me."

"Just what I told him later," Maggie agreed. "But he said not so—if he had his dispatcher call the cops that a girl was hustling at such-and-such corner and they said so what, and later her body turned up and Quark told how he'd got word to them which they'd ignored, and she turned out to be from a family that rates, heavy stuff could come down. So they'd send a cop."

One of Robert Twohy's new-generation stories, in appreciation of another, earlier writer's timeless contribution to American fiction . . .

M A G G I E

by **ROBERT TWOHY**

I write short stories, or some days just sit and look at a yellow pad, put down a few words, X them out, sit some more, draw some geometrics, practice shading—

An hour of that and I was off in my old Pontiac down to Delaware Street, where Quark lives in a triplex. He's a night cabdriver with a talent for getting into messes which sometimes I've worked into plot ideas, which today I could use one.

His old white Ford wagon wasn't in the drive but could be around back. I climbed the eleven wooden steps to the deck and pulled open the screen door and rapped—not loud, as by midafternoon he's usually up but sometimes not.

Nothing happening, I tried the knob—sometimes he neglects to push the lock button. Not this time. The knob didn't turn.

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So he was still down, or at large, or in the kitchen fixing wakeup coffee—which, if so, he'd soon appear, to sit on the deck this pleasant, lightly breezy June afternoon.

There's a straight kitchen chair and a broken recliner that holds together if there are no sudden moves. Gradually getting down on it, I laid my head back and allowed the breezes to diddle with my whiskers. Nice.

"Hi. Who are you?"

I blinked at a small girl in jeans and a blue-striped shirt of Quark's behind the screen. She had a round pink face and blue eyes under light-brown bangs.

Straightening and swinging my legs, the chair fell apart.

She giggled, then said solemnly, "Gee, I hope you're not wrecked."

"Oh, no." I got up. "Quark home?"

"No." She cocked her head, frowned, brushed a round cheek. "Lopsided. Want I should fix you up?"

I got the recliner up and together, sidebar rammed back in, ready for the next performance. "Thanks, but I have to, uh—tell him I came by, okay?" I said my name.

Batting the blue eyes, she took me to Dixie. "'Onnesly, suh, ah haven't 'tacked a gentleman's vuhchew on a front pawch faw days. 'Owahs, anyway. Leas' ah doan think so." With a sigh, she laid knuckles on her forehead, murmured, "Sometimes ah hev li'l mem'ry labses."

I gave that the chuckle it rated, fingered sidewhiskers. "Lopsided, huh?"

"Uh huh. Take me five minutes—sit." Waving at the straight chair, then flipping offscreen.

I'm putty in the paws of a small miss who for her own amusement or whatever seeks to manipulate me. I sat in the straight chair.

She appeared with a blue bathtowel, which she looped around my neck. From a rear pocket came a square tin mirror, which she gave me, then scooted around back and fanned out whiskers both sides, proving lopsidery. "Whadoyou do, just close your eyes and hack?"

"Light in my room's no good. Who are you?"

"Maggie. Whyn'che go in another room?"

"Light's worse."

Pocketing the mirror, she pulled out a moderate-sized scissors, which she snapped close to my nose. "Want to look like Jack Nicholson in *Chinatown*?"

"I don't think so, thanks anyway. Maggie, huh? Funny."

She left off snapping. "What is?"

"Last night in a letter I said that 'The Open Boat' is my idea of the nearly perfect short story. A guy named Stephen Crane wrote it, long time ago. He also wrote a short novel called *Maggie*."

"That's funny?"

"Well, odd maybe—coincidence, I mean."

She shrugged. "Okay. Now stop talking and don't move your head."

She worked the overgrown portside, then went right, then back and forth, eyes narrow, tongue tip in front of her teeth, left hand pushing and turning my chin, no nonsense. I closed my eyes and let be what would be.

She propped up my chin to work under, then down the neck.

"That's it." I got a cheek pat and the mirror.

I was smooth and even, neck almost naked for once. "Thanks, Maggie. I'm close to respectable."

"Anyway, you're even." She took the mirror, which with the scissors she shoved aft, then snapped the towel a few times and folded and laid it on her knees as she perched on the bottom of the recliner. "You a cabdriver, too?"

"Was. Now I write short stories."

"That a fact. Care for coffee?"

"Sure."

"I'll bring it out." She gave a cat-yawn, wriggled her small torso, gazed around. "Nice here in the sun. Be a few minutes." She flipped up and, with the towel, slid past the screen door.

I wandered to the rail, leaned on knuckles, and watched the action on Delaware. Not much. Cars passed. A Chinese tot came by with her mommy, who tossed me a small smile which I fielded and sent back. An old folk crept by. Two cool dudes of fourteen or so, black and white, came swaggering. Nothing exotic happened—it was just Quark's block operating as usual on a balmy June afternoon.

I turned and Maggie had a pot of coffee and two thick white cups which she crouched to set on the deck. "Milk, sugar?" I said yes. She bounced back inside. I took the straight chair and leaned to pour coffee.

She came with a carton of milk and a box of sugar cubes—and a spoon, which she gave me, setting the other stuff handy. I reached her a full cup and wagged the milk carton, which she spurned. Perching, she nipped a sugar cube, floated it into her cup, and neatly stirred with a finger.

I asked, "Where'd Quark go?"

"I dunno. Out somewhere, I guess."

"How long you been here with him?"

"'Bout a week."

"How'd you meet him?"

One side of her mouth went up. "Why? Going to do a story about me?"

"You never know. You meet people and maybe find out about them. If you do, they may pop up later when you need somebody for a story."

"Okay—what's today?"

"Wednesday the seventeenth."

"Two weeks ago last night I was on El Camino. He pulled up, I waved him on. He yelled to get in or he'd call a cop."

I worked that into a shape—

At night, on El Camino, main highway along the Peninsula, you see at the curb girls with thumbs cocked at the hip, most just wanting a ride, a few working. They're dressed casual, jeans and a shirt or sweater, but with definite makeup and usually a big handbag they swing a little as they watch approaching cars. If a cop car shows, they step up on the sidewalk and start walking briskly.

Maggie murmured, "Get the picture?"

"I guess. Quark yelled he'd call a cop? Sounds kind of naive."

"Just what I told him later. But he said not so—if he had his dispatcher call the cops that a girl was hustling at such-and-such corner and they said so what, and later her body turned up and Quark told how he'd got word to them which they'd ignored, and she turned out to be from a family that rates, heavy stuff could come down. So they'd send a cop."

"I guess it makes sense. Anyway, you got in."

"Yeah, I did. That was in Millbrae. He drove to Famous Dog and got us dogs and coffee, and we sat in the cab and he said just what I knew he would—that I was a damnfool kid who didn't know the risks I was running and he'd drive me home, and if he saw me on the hustle again he'd call the cops for sure. I said thanks for worrying about a damnfool kid but I wasn't, and told him my age. Guess."

"Eighteen—maybe nineteen."

"Twenty next September. He wouldn't believe it. Asked for ID—which I had some, but fake. So I showed him my high-school graduation photo, dated last year. He said he'd thought I was fifteen, if that."

"You must look different at night."

"I do. I put on too much makeup and not very well, with a silly beautymark. I have this round face and I'm pretty short, and the impression I try for is a girl fifteen trying to look nineteen." She gazed off. "You'd be surprised the guys cruising El Camino at night with one thing in mind. Lolita."

"I know. I used to drive at night."

She said flatly, "You *don't* know. To know that scene you got to be right in it."

I conceded the point. She bent, got the pot, and poured us, each of us dosing as before, she finishing with the one-finger fliparound.

"So after Famous Dog, what?"

"He asked where'd I live, and I said nowhere particular. He said come home with him. I said he'd been nice to stop but I had my life to work out, which if he was going to be part of I'd see him again. I thanked him for the dog and kissed him and walked to the curb."

"What'd he do?"

"Sat and watched me, I guess, till a guy pulled up."

We sat a while. I said, "Here you are."

"Yeah, here I am—Maggie, a girl of the streets." The eyes teased me.

I blinked. I'd mentioned the book *Maggie*, but not the subtitle, which she just had.

Nobody knows that book. It was Stephen Crane's first, written almost a hundred years ago. People have heard of *The Red Badge of Courage*, which John Huston made a movie of, and short-story nuts know "The Open Boat" and other stories by Crane. Literary types know he was America's first great realistic writer, *Maggie* preceding Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* by a few years. But nobody, I mean nobody age nineteen you've just met on a friend's front deck, knows *Maggie*!

I asked how come she did?

She set down her empty cup, sat straight, folded her hands between her knees. "Last October in Santa Rosa, a sudden rainstorm—start the story with that."

"Did I say I was going to do a story?"

She got the crooked smile. "You might. If you do, do the rain scene, then get to a short girl running into the library there, snatching a book off a table, and finding a chair and starting to read. Tell how right away she gets a funny feeling that something's happening. She reads on and it's like reading about herself. The scene is New

York, where she's never been, and Maggie doesn't look like her, is different in every detail, but she knows Maggie was her in another time. Tell how she wonders why, out of all the million or so books in that library, *Maggie* happened to be the one she grabbed."

I shrugged. "Odds were the same for all of them. No big deal."

"Maybe. Anyway, halfway through she's crying, 'cause she knows how Maggie'll end up and can hardly finish for tears. Everyone's staring as she moans and sniffles but she doesn't care. She slips the book under her sweater and walks past the desk, knowing the library woman knew but wasn't going to do anything." She licked her lips. "She had entered into that short girl, Maggie had, and would be part of her till she died."

"The girl fell in love with Maggie."

"Yes."

"With a fiction character."

"Who was a real girl Stephen Crane knew, who when she threw herself in the river he wrote the book. So she went from the river into his book, and then into the girl who was for a couple of days in Santa Rosa. That's the story for you to write."

"I'd have to know a lot more. Who you are, where you're from, why you were in Santa Rosa, where your head was, why Maggie hit you so hard."

She waved a hand. "You know all you need to. You know that a girl ran into the library last October and found Maggie and Maggie found her—and was part of her till she died."

"Till Maggie died?"

"No, the short girl."

"*You* died?"

"Not me. I'm Maggie, a girl of the streets."

I gazed at her. She smiled. I said, "Okay. It's your story, not mine."

She leaned forward, fingers hard on my knee, and stared brightly and steadily. "Write it. Write the story of Maggie."

"No way. Crane wrote it, a poet and a prodigy. I wouldn't mess with it."

"He left her dead. Write what happened after that—in Santa Rosa, California, on a rainy day in October nineteen eighty-seven."

"How'd the short girl die?"

"Ask Quark."

She ducked and hooked the empty coffeepot on a finger, her cup on another, jumped up, gestured me to hook my cup on a free finger and hand her the carton, stepped to the screen, got it open, and

slipped in. Came out in five seconds and got the sugar box from me, motioned I should lean forward, patted my cheek and twisted it, not hard but so my face turned up, bent and put her lips to mine, and murmured, "Write it, okay?"

She went inside, threw me a smile through the screen, was gone.

I went to the rail and gazed out. Same scene, different cars and saunterers, nothing riveting. I turned, thinking she'd be back out, but she wasn't.

I pulled the screen and knocked at the door. "Maggie?" I tried the knob and it was rigid.

I didn't know what turn her game had taken—or if she'd got bored and canceled it. I called, "Maggie, come tell me more, we'll work up a plot!"

The door stayed shut and I turned and headed for the steps, stopping when Quark's voice sounded.

"Where you off to?"

He was inside the screen in shorts and nothing else. His brown hair and his long face were rumpled and his brown eyes didn't seem to be focusing too good. He mumbled, "Wha time zit?"

"Four-twelve. She said you were out."

"Whuff." He rubbed his cheeks. "No wonder I'm dopey—slept all day. Coffee. Gotta have coffee." He was gone from the screen.

I went in. The main room was messy as usual, his clothes here and there, newspapers, general haphazardry. On one arm of the short couch lay the blue-striped shirt.

The bathroom door was open. I glanced in the kitchen and Quark was at the sink, tossing grounds from the coffeepot into the trashcan. Beyond the bathroom was the bedroom, door partially open. I tapped. "Maggie?" I pushed in. The bed was unmade, stuff lay around. She wasn't there.

I went back to the kitchen. Quark had rinsed the coffeepot and was working on a cup. The sink was full of cups, plates, pans, silver.

I walked past him, unlocked the back door, and looked down at his white Ford wagon, then beyond it across the vacant field that ends at the fence behind the properties on Claremont Street. When I turned back, he was setting the pot on the range.

"Where'd she go?"

He closed his eyes and shook his head hard a few times. "Don't hit me with strange stuff, not yet. Lemme go wash my face."

When he returned from the bathroom, he looked less fuddled and

his eyes had some focus. He looked at the pot starting to perk, then at me. "Who you talking about?"

"Maggie."

"Who's she?"

"Don't be funny."

He sighed, got two clean cups. I said, "Not me, I'm coffeed up." He got the milk carton from the reefer—the sugar box was on the cluttered table. He poured himself coffee, sat, pushed stuff to make room in front, put milk and two sugars in his cup, and stirred with a spoon. I'd sat in the chair across.

He took a big whack of coffee, shook his head. "You talking about Marge Reardon? Was she here?"

"Not Marge Reardon—Maggie! C'mon, stop acting stupid."

"If I am, it's because I get no sense from your babble. No girl's been here for a month. Or if one was today, I was asleep." He glowered. "You playing some game on me?"

I could start yelling, but that wouldn't clear up anything. I said carefully, "A girl was here, said she was Maggie. Maybe you'd left the front door unlocked like you do."

"It was locked. I unlocked it for you just now."

"*She* unlocked it for me. Then she locked it. She was in and out. She said you'd gone somewhere. She made coffee, which we had on the deck, and before that she trimmed my whiskers. She had on your blue-striped shirt that's on the couch—did *you* put it there?"

"How would I know where I put it? I wore it a few nights ago, put it somewhere. This girl was wearing it? Why?"

"I dunno. But if you're not playing a game and I'm not, *she* was."

He reached for the pot, refilled his cup, dosed it, drank. "A girl was really here?"

"Yes."

"What'd she look like?"

"Small, brown hair, blue eyes. Cute. Bright."

He closed his eyes, squeezed forehead skin, mumbled, "Lots of girls like that."

"She trimmed my whiskers. How do I look—even?" He shrugged. "She did it. We each had two cups of coffee. And she said how you picked her up two weeks ago Tuesday in Millbrae."

He raised his face, stared. "What'd you say?"

"She said you picked her up on El Camino in Millbrae, took her to Famous Dog for a dog and coffee, and thought she was fifteen until she showed you her high-school graduation photo—"

He jumped up, his face hard and red and his eyes hot. "How d'you know all that? Did you see her, talk to her—when? Why are you lying it was this afternoon?"

I got up. "Because it was!"

"Damn you, she's dead! Been dead a week!"

My face was as red and tense as his probably. Jabbing a finger, I shouted, "You! *You're* the liar, not me!" I rubbed my cheeks. "Was she dead when she trimmed me? Was she dead when she drank coffee, no milk one sugar, stirring with her finger? She's not dead—why are you lying she is?"

Out of air, I stopped to regroup. Quark looked at me and his face toned down and loosened as the heat went out of his eyes. Slowly he sat down. So did I. He said, low, "All right. So a girl was here. But not Laurie. She's dead."

"*Ask Quark*," she'd said when I asked her how the short girl died. "How did she die?" I said.

He stared off. "Last Thursday, in the *Times*, there were just a few lines—a girl's body found in a shallow grave off Skyline, stripped, her throat slashed—about seventeen, heavy makeup, five-two, about a hundred and fifteen pounds, blue eyes, brown hair. I called Weare." That's a sheriff's detective he knows. "He had me come look at the body. It was her, Laurie."

"I called him yesterday. They hadn't found out anything about her. I guess she's buried or cremated or whatever they do with dead girls they don't have any line on."

We sat quiet. He looked empty.

I said, "I knocked and the door was locked. I sat in the recliner and it was nice, I felt the breeze—then the door opened and there she was in jeans and your shirt. —Maybe not. Maybe I dreamed her."

"Dreamed coffee with no milk, one sugar she stirred with her finger." It wasn't a question but a memory.

"I came for a story idea if you had one. Last night I'd thought of Stephen Crane, a writer who wrote a book called *Maggie*. Maybe I slept in the recliner and you were asleep and I tuned in on your subconscious or something. I don't believe in telepathy or ESP or any of that, but what do I know? Maybe it happens. So in my dream the girl Maggie told me about Famous Dog and about showing you the photo and how when she left she thanked you for the dog and said she might see you again and kissed you, and walked to the curb."

He gave a slow nod.

"So she was a dream, or you're playing a sick game, or I am. Or a girl came here today and found the door unlocked and came in and told me her name was Maggie."

He said tiredly, "Who could know all she told you?"

"Maybe a girl who looked like Laurie—a relative maybe, a sister—who Laurie had told about you picking her up, and she came here to play a game on you for some reason, or no reason. You were asleep and I showed up and she played it on me." I got up. "One or the other—I dreamed her or she was real."

In the bathroom mirror I looked even, and so what? I could have trimmed myself in the last few days, which I do every now and then not thinking about it particularly, and got myself even for once despite the poor light in my room. Or a small, brown-haired girl came out on the porch and did the job.

I opened the laundry hamper and a blue towel lay atop stuff there. I took it to the window and went over it and found one short grey hair.

Quark is thirty-five, with here and there some grey in the brown. Other guys visit and use the bathroom. I wadded the towel and put it back in the hamper.

Quark looked at me heavy-eyed. I thought he'd rather be alone, to think of Laurie or maybe stop thinking of her and get his mind on something else. I said, "See you around." He flopped a hand.

I drove home, fixed some dinner, and ate it, drank milk not coffee, thinking I'd had enough, or, if not, felt like I had.

I got my collected Stephen Crane and turned to *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*, sat in the armchair, and read till dark, when I switched on the lamp and finished the story.

Dousing the lamp, I went to bed and slept, no doubt—waking suddenly to see the lamp on and Maggie curled in the armchair with a thin brown book. She wore jeans as before and a yellow sweater.

"Is that the book you swiped from the Santa Rosa library?"

She nodded, closed it.

"Quark told me how the short girl died."

"You can put that in the story. Here's the ending—me in your room and glad because you're going to write it."

"Are you going to leave me the book?"

"No."

"Just as well. Tomorrow I'd be sure I'd got it at a garage sale."

She slid from the chair and came over. Cocking her head and narrowing the blue eyes, she took my face in hands soft but firm, studied it—let it go and nodded. “Not bad for a first time.”

She bent, kissed me—and that was it.

In the morning, I doused the lamp. Which I’d thought I had last night but could be wrong.

So that’s Maggie, as she was for me June seventeenth on Quark’s deck, and in my room.

I’m no Stephen Crane, but so what? Here it is. What you wanted, Maggie—the story, with love.



DETECTIVERSE

MORE GRAVE TONES

by JAMES HOLDING

Here lies Jon “Insider” Brill,
An arbitrager of dazzling skill—
Another Wall Street V.I.P.
Brought to earth by the S.E.C.

Here lies a criminal, “Scot Free” Frank,
Who lost his life while robbing a bank.
“Scot Free” had committed many a crime,
But he never got caught, never served time.
Formal police record had he none—
His only arrest was a cardiac one.

© 1987 by James Holding.

a **NEW Neil Hockaday story by**

THOMAS ADCOCK

Being a cop, ruminates Hock in this dark new case, is more what you'd call an art than a science. Being a reasonably alert cop means sometimes trusting an instinct that you might have come up with an exception to a rule. The exception in this case being a Manhattan squatter and painter known as Picasso, whose threat to kill someone within the next few days Hock perceives to be very real—a killing he is determined to prevent, "mere child's play for a catcher in the rye."

Thomas Adcock's Precinct 19, which first brought his work to our attention, is now available in paperback and is also climbing the charts in France . . .

THE DARK MAZE

by THOMAS ADCOCK

“Cop, ain’t you?”

His question wasn’t in the least unfriendly, nor was it anxious. This was just a guy casually interested in knowing if he’d pegged me right. That’s all, so it seemed.

He was short and moon-faced and somewhere past sixty, maybe thirty pounds too much. His eyes were dull-brown and beady behind thick wire-rims. His skin was pasty, but clear, and he had a close-cropped dark-red goatee with lots of grey shot through. He wore a navy-blue beret on top of what I guessed to be a bald head. It was a cool April day, but a line of sweat trickled down from under his beret, down over the front of his right ear, and then along his fleshy jaw until the droplets disappeared into those rusty whiskers.

Over on the other side of the park from where I was, he’d been

© 1987 by Thomas Adcock.

sitting in a patch of shade, reading one of those tabloids crammed with stories about two-headed babies and UFOs, amazing diets where you drink all the beer and eat all the chocolate you please and lose pounds while you sleep, ghosts of Elvis Presley and wild wolf-boys prowling the countryside. Edifying things like that. I'd, of course, noticed the old geezer. (It wasn't especially difficult since the only other presence in the park besides the two of us was an aromatic gentleman sprawled belly-up on a bench dozing off the effects of an economy-sized bottle of muscatel.) The way it played to me, he was a harmless neighborhood character who'd come outdoors with his beret and his goofy newspaper for a breath of comparatively fresh air. I didn't have any reason to pay him special attention. And that day I had plenty of my own concerns.

He'd been watching me closely, though, for reasons that would wind up consuming the better part of my next seventy-two off-duty hours. And now here he was, standing in front of me, waiting for an answer.

"Yeah, I'm a cop. How'd you know?"

He turned to look at somebody beside him, only there was no one there. "He says t'me, *'How'd y'know?'* Can you beat it?"

And then to me he said, "Listen, if I wanted, I could go to the beach at Coney Island on the Fourth of July and pick out a cop. If the cop was wearin' little swim-trunks with sailboats on 'em, I could pick him out from everybody else layin' around in the sand. I got great powers of observation."

"Okay."

"If I can do that, then it sure ain't much of a trick I can make *you* out t'be the law, right?"

He didn't wait for my answer. Instead, he turned for confirmation of his great powers of observation to the ghost next to him and said, "Damn straight I'm right."

Then he folded his tabloid lengthwise and stuffed it into a side pocket of his battered cream-colored-linen jacket you could tell was very top-drawer once upon a time. He fished out a lacquer-paper packet of tiny cheroots from another pocket and offered me one. We lit up and watched the Tenth Avenue traffic roll on uptown for nearly a minute.

In a city that is not subtle in its folkways, this chubby old fellow was a herald of spring in New York. Anywhere else, you'd see ladies in housedresses hanging laundry out in the nice new breezes, robins digging up worms from wet grass, or boys haggling over marbles in

playgrounds. My Uncle Liam on the other side says spring is the season when milk tastes like onions, because in Ireland the farmers still put their cows out to pasture then and the cows eat onion grass, which sprouts after the pussy willows but before the forsythia, along about the same time as the skunk cabbage. But in New York, you know winter is over when suddenly every third man you see in a business suit is wearing a yellow necktie and you begin to notice people walking around midtown Manhattan, usually in clusters, with vaguely apprehensive expressions on their fair-skinned faces and tourist maps in their back pockets. And when the parks begin filling up with men and women who need to talk to somebody after a lone and lonely winter indoors. And they begin to tell strangers the disquieting stories of their lives.

"So I'm wondering something," he said, exhaling sweet blue smoke. "You dress like that all the time or is this here your day off?"

"Both, you might say."

The fact was, I'd strung together six days of variously paid leave in order to get through the aggravation of having to move out of my two rooms down in the East Village, which I'd taken a half dozen years ago because the place was cheap and divorce was expensive. Now the joint was going co-op and there wasn't anything I could do about it except complain to anybody who cared to listen to how it was an outrage that I first got kicked out of my house by my wife and now I was kicked out of two crummy rooms with cockroaches by my landlord just because I don't happen to have a quarter million to buy the dump.

So what's the only place I could find in a hurry? A flat back in Hell's Kitchen—a place you would not describe as rustic. It's due west of Times Square along the Hudson River—and it's where I happen to have grown up. At least when I was a kid, everybody called it Hell's Kitchen. That was when it was a respectable slum for dock workers and typesetters, peddlers, saloon-keepers, small-time hoods, jazz musicians, and waitresses like my mother.

Now it's changing for the worse—and fast. Real-estate sharpies have discovered that youngsters who grew up in suburbia and went off to college and landed big jobs in the city don't kick about paying big rents in old tenements with "character," so long as most of the character is covered over in white walls and beige carpeting so the rooms look something like they do back in suburbia. So today my old neighborhood is officially known by the more genteel name of Clinton because the smart new breed of Manhattan landlord and

the best New York politicians their money can buy are of the opinion that newer residents with fancy jobs might think the old name was icky.

So here I was, back in the familiar streets, freshly reestablished in a big three-room walkup in a dingy tenement that thankfully still smelled of fish and boiled beef and simmering tomatoes and fried chicken instead of lettuce and brie. I'd spent one whole day thus far recovering from the actual move, which was a humbling event. A small truck pulled up to my place in the East Village and two skinny young guys packed up everything I own in this world in about twenty-five minutes and left me on the street, watching them ride off with it to Hell's Kitchen, where it all began. I had to follow in a taxi driven by a guy with no teeth who smoked dope and played Hawaiian music on a tape deck all the way.

Add to this misery the fact that my girl friend Sandy wasn't due back from her librarians' convention in Cleveland for another day and you might understand why all I wanted out of a cool and lonesome April day off was to sit down for a cozy little self-absorbing depression in a small park at the corner. But along comes this little old guy with a beret and an imaginary friend wanting to know about my wardrobe.

If anything, I suppose, I was dressed a little better than I usually do on the job, the idea there being that I should look at least as insignificant as I did that day in my chinos with the holes in the knees and some ten years' worth of paint stains, a green T-shirt from a Hoboken exterminating company with a picture of a dead household pest on it, a denim jacket frayed at the cuffs and collar, a Yankees baseball cap, and a badly deteriorating pair of black high-top P-F Flyer sneakers I'd had from when I was still a uniform and coaching some for the P.A.L. basketball circuit out in Queens—where I used to have a wife and a house with a garden in back and the last place in the world I thought I'd ever see again outside of police business was Hell's Kitchen.

"Say, I get it," my new acquaintance said. "You're one of them plainclothes cops. What's your name, anyway?"

"Neil Hockaday."

"That so? Ain't I heard of you? Ain't you the detective they call Hock? Sure you are—you been in the newspapers. You're the famous Hock from the S.C.U.M. patrol—right?"

"Famous I don't know—I sure as hell hope not," I said.

Inspector Tommy Neglio, my boss, likes to provide me with

friendly perspective on a regular basis. "Hock," he'll say, "you're the lowest of the low-key cops I got working under my command. Think of yourself like you're wallpaper." So even if once in a while I might do something that gets my name in the papers, fame is not what you'd call the principal objective of my squad. Which is called the Street Crimes Unit—Manhattan, though I don't know a cop anywhere in the city who ever called it anything but the S.C.U.M. patrol—and I wouldn't be surprised if most of them didn't know what the letters even stand for since the initials do such a fine job of describing what I do for a living. So long as the sidewalks of New York include a healthy percentage of thugs, junkies, psychopaths, hookers, freaks, hustlers, and the generally confused, I draw a paycheck.

"Well, pleased to meet'cha," he said. He stuck out a hand and we shook. "Bet'cha don't know who I am."

I let his hand go and told him I'd lose the bet.

"Don't worry you don't know me. I ain't made much of a mark in this life." He finished his cheroot and tossed the butt out toward the traffic. The sun began dipping down below the buildings. "Mind if I sit with you?"

I shrugged my shoulders, which he took to mean that I didn't mind. Actually, I was thinking how I wouldn't mind so much being a forest ranger or a lighthouse keeper and how I wouldn't even complain about the lousy bread and the coffee that would probably come with that kind of territory.

"Everybody around here and even downtown in the galleries calls me Picasso," he said. "Wanna know why?"

"You're a painter?" It sounded as dumb to me as it did to him. So I wasn't surprised when he sneered about it to his imaginary friend.

"*You're a painter?*" he asks. Can you beat it?" He lit another of his little black cheroots, only this time he didn't offer one to me. He puffed, then pointed to the other side of the avenue and said, "See over there across the way in the bodega window where the white lettering says 'Special today—pork two-nineteen a pound' and there's a picture of a hog who looks scared out of his wits?"

"Yeah, I see."

"Well, Hock, that there's a genuine Picasso. Bet'cha didn't know old Picasso dabbled in the medium of calcimine, hey?"

He laughed hard at his own joke. It was one of the sorriest, nastiest laughs I've ever heard.

"I do the Puerto Rican's windows over there regular," Picasso said, "and he keeps me in smokes and wine and the occasional cheese

sandwich. That's about as close as I get any more to the artistic thrills of being a painter. Notice how I captured the essential fear of the hog, in his eyeballs? I'm always studying the essence of things, always observing, see. I study people in the streets until I figure their essentials. Like I done with you, figurin' you were a cop."

"So what do you do for money?"

"Little as possible since I'm savin' myself for my art." He said this to his invisible companion and laughed another of his nasty laughs. "Lucky for me, though, Hock, I don't need too much scratch. I'm all I got any more and I don't have what anybody'd call overhead—just a room over there where, to tell you the truth, I'm squatting."

Picasso pointed down Tenth Avenue to the sooty and crumbled remains of a five-story, red-brick tenement. I knew it from the old days when I was a kid playing stoopball with a pal named Sheldon whose father had a tailor shop in the place. Now the doorway and the tailor-shop window were sealed up with grey cinder blocks and all the apartment windows above were sheeted over with tin.

Next to it, an attached lower building had been torn down. That's where the Leprechaun Bar used to be, which even when I was a kid was a hangout for wiseguys. One day in 1971, Mickey Featherstone of the Westies Gang was drinking away an evening and wound up pulling his .38 revolver on the late Linwood Willis, whose last moments were spent telling the other patrons of the Leprechaun that Featherstone didn't look so tough to him. Now all that's left of that is a vacant lot full of broken bricks and glass.

On the other side of the vacant lot from the tenement where Picasso squatted in some rent-free corner of darkness, there was the single legally occupied premises on the block—a tiny shop that sold pornographic magazines, Lotto tickets, and flasks of wine and spirits, a shop with a huge orange-neon sign that flashed LIQUOR over and over into the nights and the mornings after.

From the parlor windows of my new place, this was my view and Picasso's domain. I told him how it was we were neighbors on either side of this tattered park.

"Good to have a cop in the neighborhood," he said. "Now I feel all warm and safe." Again he laughed. "I want you t'know, Hock, what I'm doing up there in a room in a vacant building all by myself with a few canvases and oils and what I got on my back. I ain't hurtin' nobody else even though staying there's technically what you'd say was slightly against the law. So I'm hurting the owner of the building? Hell, I'm only taking up space a pack of rats would take up

otherwise. And what I do for money ain't hurting anybody too much—so far as I know, it ain't even illegal."

"What is it you do exactly?"

"I got a little mail-order sideline, for which I use this here journal." Picasso took the tabloid out of his pocket and opened it up to show me a full page of advertisements for postal loans, elevator shoes, flying-saucer radar-detection kits, vinyl-repair franchises, Rosicrucian secrets of the universe, and his own spot: *U.S. Citizen? Thousands of government-backed jobs are yours! Send \$5 (cash only) for value-packed list.*

"So what do you send to the suckers?"

"For a fiver, they get the latest U.S. Civil Service hire sheet, which yours truly gets from the post office for nothing and I then Xerox for a dime. Ain't that something?"

"Oh, sure."

"I mean, ain't it something the way people think you got to pay for everything in life, which ain't the way it is at all. Plenty of guys get free lunch and martinis every day by sticking Uncle Sam for the tab. I tell you, Hock, the suckers don't even think they got a right to talk for free any more. Like when he's got problems, he thinks he can't sit down and talk it over with a friend, like you and me's doing here. A sucker thinks he's gotta pay some shrink to listen to him.

"You ever come across't a shrink who wasn't a loon? I never did. And you're talking to a guy who's been checking in regular at Bellevue since nineteen and fifty-seven."

He paused. "I s'pose you think I'm barking nuts, hey?"

"Maybe," I said. "If you think you are, I'd be interested in hearing you tell me how come."

"*How come,*' he wants t'know! How bloody damn bleedin' heart of him. Can you beat it?"

He looked down the avenue. An M-11 Broadway bus was a few blocks below Forty-second Street. The park where we sat would be one of its stops.

"What you're asking, Hock, is too simple. You ought t'know better than to think anybody who's got a busted life like me has got simple answers for it. You're a cop, you ought to have better sense."

He was right and I told him so.

He said, "All I can tell you is I once lived out of town somewhere. Things are much different, only I look about the same now as I did before. I had two kids. They turned out bad. One went rotten, the

other went Christian. I didn't belong there, so I come to New York, which I figure is essentially a place where odd socks like me can fit in. In a manner of speaking, I ran away to join the circus. That's the way it worked out anyway, since the only chance anybody ever give me as an artist was a place at Coney Island." He looked at the dead cheroot in his hand. "I sure never figured on failing as spectacular as I did."

The bus was a half block from us now and Picasso stood up and flagged it. "I got some things I wanna get done t'day," he said. "See you around the neighborhood." Just before the bus doors opened, he turned and added, "Since you're a cop, maybe you'd like t'know this—I'm sick 'n tired of *'how come'* in my goddamn life, so I'm going to kill somebody responsible for some of it. Day after tomorrow."

As far as I know, nobody has ever taken a scientific measure of the frequency of death threats in New York. On a nice tree-lined street in Staten Island on a quiet night of a pleasant month, my guess is it could be twelve or thirteen times an hour. That would represent the low end of the scale. Here and there around the five boroughs, you have your more vengeful precincts. I've worked a lot of station houses around New York, and no matter what the local atmosphere an idle homicidal threat is nearly always treated as a low priority.

People who aren't cops think this is callous and shocking until it's pointed out to them that very few murders are premeditated or even threatened, no matter what the mystery magazines say, and that anybody who goes popping off about killing somebody—especially when he pops off about it to a *cop*—has just gone and gotten rid of about ninety-nine percent of the pent-up rage he'd need to actually carry it off.

On the other hand, being a cop is more what you'd call an art than a science. Being a reasonably alert cop means sometimes trusting an instinct that you might have come up against an exception to a rule. Picasso boarding that bus was one of those times. I believed he had it in his heart to kill. From the way he wound up our unsettling little chat, I wasn't at all confident that he had a mind capable of the blessing of emotional restraint.

To prevent a killing, I would have to anticipate the actions of a nut job who lived in an abandoned building and called himself Picasso. According to what he said, I had forty-eight hours. Or less.

I telephoned Neglio from a booth in a delicatessen and arranged to meet him at a tavern on Ninth Avenue at six o'clock.

The Film Center Cafe has seen better days and worse. Until only a few months ago, nobody recently ate anything there except if they absolutely had to, and then it was only some soggy hunk of indistinct meat in gravy from a steam table or stale peanuts in cellophane bags to go along with domestic beer in cans. Some decades back, I remember the curb outside being lousy with Packards and Lincolns and Frazer Manhattans and the owners checking their weapons at the door and then stepping inside to a place lit in dark-pink with plenty of shadows from all the mahogany where they'd drink vintage French wines and twelve-year-old scotch and eat well aged Porter-house steaks and smoke pre-revolutionary Cuban macanudos. Nowadays, the place is in its third incarnation. The bar serves mainly white-wine spritzers to a slender clientele, the back is full-up with young people who have apple-pie faces and order things like blackened redfish and are unable to talk about anything other than business or other restaurants or their therapists, the new owners never heard of Fulgencio Batista y Zaldivar and don't know from cigars anyway, and nobody smokes except for a few old rummies who drop by for shots and chasers and wonder what the hell happened to their joint.

I sat in a booth for two up front near the bar, waiting for Neglio and having myself a Johnny Walker Red and a Molson ale. The bartender was playing a reel-to-reel with cuts of Lester Young, Mabel Mercer, Jack Teagarden, George Shearing, and John Coltrane despite the fact that most of the customers looked like they preferred Talking Heads or Billy Idol or Beastie Boys or Twisted Sister's greatest hits, so I knew there was hope for the place still.

Neglio walked in at ten minutes past six and didn't look at all happy about it.

"I thought you wanted a furlough real bad, Hock." He sat down across from me. I'd ordered a Black Bush Irish for him, knowing it would at least not worsen his mood and might brighten it considerably, and it sat there waiting for him. "So what, you miss me already?"

"No, I just thought you could stand reacquainting yourself with the city that lies between One Police Plaza and your house up in Riverdale."

Neglio ignored the fraternal insult and put away about half his

whiskey. "Speaking of which, let's cut to the chase. I got my driver waiting outside and already he's on overtime. You said you had something choice you needed to consult me on. So enough with the flattery, let's have something choice."

I told him I had an idle homicidal threat, which I knew was low priority, and when he slapped his forehead like I thought he would I told him I was springing for another Black Bush and he decided to hear me out.

"The guy's some sort of a failed painter. Also, he's lost a family, so there's another failure on his head. He's a squatter in a rathole of a building, but he manages to keep himself clean and his clothes are good."

"They're sure as hell better than yours, I'll bet," Neglio interrupted.

This time during the tussle that is the surest and most ironic sign of abiding respect and friendship between two men, it was my turn to ignore the friendly swipe.

"He says he's been in and out of Ding Dong School and nobody ever helped him out over there," I said. "So maybe he's got it in mind to ice some doctor. But he's also squawking about how he's only done one commission as a painter, out in Coney Island. He says they call him Picasso in the art community—so maybe he's after somebody in Soho or Fifty-seventh Street or upper Madison. At any rate, he says he's going to do it. And maybe if you heard him laugh at himself like I did, Chief, if you saw for yourself this fat old guy whose dreams have—"

"Listen to me, Hock," Neglio interrupted. A waiter set down his second Irish and he mumbled a thank-you and rubbed his forehead. "I trust your instincts probably as much as you do. In fact, from where I sit, I depend on your instincts. So I'm with you on this. You feel you got enough to take this on yourself and get me involved as your rabbi, okay—swell. But now here's the part where I have to tell you there's not very much either of us can do here. You know that, right?"

"I know that."

"So you know where he's squirreled up, your neighbor the nut. We can call in a pass-by order for the next however many days at Midtown North. You manage to get a real line on a couple of other places he's likely to hang and we'll get pass-bys on them, too."

Neglio looked at his wristwatch and I lost it with him. I was shouting, "That's *it*? You're going to have some uniforms on the

regular prowl make a little extra point of cruising by Picasso's place on their tour? That's all you're going to do about a guy we both know means what he says about killing somebody?"

"Keep your shorts dry, Hock. What the hell else can you reasonably expect me or anybody else in the department to do? It's not like he's made some specific threat on some specific person."

"Yeah, I know—"

"That's good to hear. Now here's another little lesson for you before I get up and go on home where I belong. What we're living in here is a city that's an incubator for crazies, all kinds of crazies. Every day you have maybe a thousand budding crazies hit town thinking this is the place they're finally going to swing on a star. One or two of them are right about themselves, or lucky. And that's great. That's what makes us all know this here isn't Kansas. A lot of them go home and a lot of them settle into lives remarkably the same as people who live in Kansas. And then there are the few who turn mean somehow and that's just how it is. You know as well as I do, Hock. This town doesn't offer tender embraces to its immigrants. I'm not saying that's right. I'm only suggesting to you that all we happen to be is cops and that we didn't make the world."

Nothing was said for several seconds. Then Neglio asked, "When the hell's Sandy coming home?"

"She's due back from Cleveland tomorrow night."

"That's not too soon. I think half of all this is you're whacked out of shape without your girl friend around to talk to."

"Maybe you're right."

Neglio was right about that. He was right about everything else he'd said, too. Of course he was right.

And of course I'd be at Bellevue the next morning to look up Picasso's doctor for a talk. And of course I'd purge the poor old fellow of demons. And of course I'd keep him from killing. Inside of forty-eight hours. Mere child's play for a catcher in the rye.

The Bellevue Hospital Center is a group of buildings, most of them having much less notoriety than a certain ward I see from time to time in my professional duties.

The doctor I was told to see after I showed my tin to about a half dozen clerks was a guy who looked like he might be working for the S.C.U.M. patrol. His name was Rizzo, he had a diploma on the wall of his office cubicle with all sorts of Latin words on it, he had bags under his eyes, and most of his hair was gone except for the luxu-

riant, frizzy growths on the sides of his head. His fingernails were cracked and dirty because, he explained, he'd been up on the roof of the building digging around in a garden he kept. "I had a seven-pound tomato up there last August," he said. I liked the guy instantly.

"Picasso was one of my favorites around here," Rizzo told me as we sat drinking coffee. "Most of your wackos aren't so bright, or if they are they're talking to me in some language I don't think anybody knows about."

"What does he do that gets him here?" I asked him.

"Last time was fairly typical. One of your guys in uniform brought him in when he was found screaming 'Philistines' for a couple of hours outside a gallery down on Prince Street. Not the first time he chose that particular gallery to scream at."

I took down the name and address of the gallery. Neglio would see to the pass-by notice. "Then what do you do for him?"

"We listen, we give him some thorazine maybe."

"What does he tell you?"

"Usually he tells me how much he hates being a nobody. The way he puts it is, he doesn't want to die an X."

"He told me he has two kids. So he's something to somebody in this world."

"That's in Ohio."

Where Sandy was, until later that night at my place.

"I got hold of one of them, the son," Rizzo said while I jotted down the names and addresses in Ohio from the file spread out in front of him. "He tried to convince me it was a case of mistaken identity. Then I got hold of the other one and she told me I had to speak to her brother the preacher, who turned out to be the guy who tried to flake me off in the first place."

"What about a wife?"

"Dead. Choked on a finger sandwich at a Tupperware party. Don't laugh, it was a tragedy. The hostess didn't sell one single flavor-saver that day."

I asked Rizzo lots more questions, but he didn't tell me much that seemed to be anything likely to help and he admitted as much. "We're a public facility, so we can't afford to indulge a patient's ills forever," he said wanly, "let alone cure them in the foreseeable future."

I tossed him one more question. "What do you know about some painting he might have done in connection with Coney Island?"

"You know what 'dark maze' means in carny lingo?" Rizzo asked me back.

I didn't.

"It generally defines a certain type of midway attraction, one designed variously to horrify or amuse or titillate. It's an enclosed attraction and the way to draw crowds is to have the outside painted up so that only children, who don't know about real nightmares yet, have the courage to look closely. Inside, the interiors are shadowy to pitch-black, with angled passageways, moving stairs and floorways, fake cobwebs that will scare the bejesus out of you, and blasts of compressed air. Some people make the mistake of calling them 'fun houses.' I used to call them that myself until I took a good look at the one Picasso painted. His is called Hell Hole, and as far as I know it's his only work. His masterpiece. The trouble with it is that it took somebody crazy and violent to produce it and people know this at a glance and shrink away. Which is why our friend Picasso has been allowed his one masterpiece, and no more."

Picasso was wrong about all shrinks being loons, I thought. Here was Rizzo making so much sense out of so much chaos. The sad part of it was that one humane doctor, decades younger than Picasso and with some rare insights, simply couldn't get to a man as far gone as Picasso.

I telephoned Neglio and told him briefly what I'd learned and gave him all the appropriate addresses, including the dark maze called Hell Hole out in Brooklyn's Coney Island amusement park.

And then I caught a taxi back across town. I wanted to call on Picasso.

The first thing you do when looking for a squatter in a vacant building is search the outside of the place for signs of where he or she might be holed up. A plastic water bottle set out on a window ledge is the usual clue. Which it was in the case of Picasso's building. It always helps to know the general direction when you come to the second thing you do when, which is to find out his or her access. Around the back, there was an old garbage bin that partly concealed a crack in the building wall. I looked behind the bin and discovered Picasso's doorway, a roughly triangular gap between two walls patched over in cinder block, about four feet high and just wide enough to admit him.

I crawled inside and stood for a while in the dark to adjust my

eyes. I drew out my heavy piece, a .44 Charter Arms Bulldog I keep in a shoulder holster, then turned on a small flashlight I'd brought from home. I was in a narrow corridor at the rear of the building and would need to get upstairs to the top floor, front and north. Outdoors, it was cool and sunny. Indoors, it was black, airless, and hot.

My flashlight disturbed a couple of bats. They made wild loops above me and I covered my head and moved quickly to the stairway. A rotted step gave way as I climbed the first flight. From that point on, I tested each riser before putting down any weight.

The place smelled strongly of cats. A squatter who knows what he's doing keeps plenty of cats in order to protect himself from vermin. At least from the kind that doesn't fly.

Five floors and I'd reached the top. I turned the flashlight on a door with letters in white calcimine: HOME IS WHERE THE HATRED IS.

I knocked. There was no answer. I pushed open the door and walked into a room dominated by a huge white canvas propped up against the north wall next to a fire-blackened window with moss and a plastic water jug out on the ledge.

On the floor were hundreds of newspapers, some of them piled up to form chairs and a table. A set of oil paints was kept on one of the piles. Other papers were meant for the cats. I counted about a half dozen skittering around the room.

Then I felt something hard at my neck.

"Hang onto your rosary beads and say goodbye."

It was Picasso's voice. I dropped to one knee and spun around, pointing my .44 at him.

"Hock, f'crissakes—I only got a paintbrush on me."

I turned the light on him. He let the paintbrush drop to the floor and the wooden handle he'd held at my neck plopped down on a yellowed copy of the *Daily News*.

I put away my .44.

"Just thought I'd drop by for another light conversation," I said.

"Sorry, but you caught me in the middle of doing what I most like to do. You know the *War Cry*, Hock?"

"The Salvation Army paper?"

"You got it. Whyn'tcha shine your light over on the wall back of me?"

There were four issues tacked to the wall, each of them opened to the obituary pages. Each page containing at least one X painted in red next to the name of the dearly departed.

"They was friends of mine. If you get straight with Sally, you at least get a writeup when you croak, even if you're nothing but an X. Nice, ain't it? Besides, I like how the obits are written. All of 'em start the same way, 'So-and-so was promoted to glory.' Nice ring to it, hey?"

"Are you okay here?" I asked.

He spoke to his pal. "He wants to know if I'm okay. Can you beat it? Hell, no, I'm not okay. It ain't particularly comforting being sick in the head, or what everybody says is sick in the head."

"That's what worries me about you, Picasso. Yesterday you said you were going to kill somebody."

"I know what I said. Y'think I'm so nuts I'd forget something like that?"

"Who do you want to kill?"

"You're the detective, whyn'tcha detect?"

Clearly, the direct approach wasn't working. The only way I'd learn anything about Picasso or his plans was obliquely.

"You need anything?"

"With all the comforts of home I got right here? Naw, save yourself some trouble, Hock. All I need's my rest. I ain't going t'be killing until tomorrow night. Now how 'bout going away and letting an old man have his peace and quiet."

I'd been looking forward to being with Sandy Gilford for the last three days, and now here she was in my living room in the candle-light with a glass of champagne and her eyes all brown and moist and her black hair catching light from soft neon beyond the window, and she was telling me how she liked the new place so much she might pack it up downtown where she lived and put in with me, and all I could think about was a crazy old guy on the other side of the park from me, sleeping on newspapers in a room full of cats.

Rain fell softly outside. I heard foghorns from over on the river. Four uniform cops on horseback rode slowly down Tenth Avenue, against light traffic, toward Forty-second Street, where they would turn west toward the Mounted Police Unit livery stable.

I stared out the window and tried to make out Picasso's blackened window in the mist but couldn't.

"Okay, so now this is what I call throwing myself at you," Sandy said. She rose from the cardboard packing-box full of books, stepped out of her dress, and knelt beside me at the window. "How about

some of your attention? I'm full of all sorts of librarian gossip from the big convention."

I told her about Picasso. About what he'd said and where he lived. About my talk with Rizzo at Bellevue. About what I'd learned about Picasso's only work.

"And you're sure he's going to kill somebody tomorrow night, but you don't have a clue?" she asked.

"Maybe I do, but I can't bring it to the top of my mind."

"Something he said? From what you've told me, he strikes me as a guy who gives off signs, like he's asking for help."

I thought back over all the things Picasso had said, at least what I could remember his saying. I thought about what Rizzo had said. I remembered making a note of his phrase, "dark maze."

And then I knew where I had to go tomorrow.

That settled, I gave Sandy my fullest attention.

It was a Saturday morning, bright-skyed and early. A couple of curly-headed teenage girls were opening up the first shop you see when emerging from the Stillwell Avenue station of the IND subway at the farthest edge of Brooklyn, which is the Philips Salt Water Taffee and Ka-Ra-Me-La stand. Before the day was out, although it was still April, the girls would sell several hundred pounds of licorice whips, pistachios, gum drops, chocolate turtles with cashews, nonpareils, peanut-butter fudge, and cheese popcorn.

Sandy was with me. She insisted on coming since it so happened she grew up in Pennsylvania and had never in her life beheld Coney Island.

"Last time I was here," I said to Sandy, "there was a newsstand, and it still sold the late Brooklyn *Eagle* about three-to-one over the New York *Daily Mirror*."

That and the age of the cars rolling by on Surf Avenue aside, everything was exactly the same as when I was a kid. Only a little worn here and there, a little sadder.

I looked into the windows of the Seashore Hotel across from the subway station. When I was a kid, I didn't see old fellows sitting in the windows in their undershirts staring mutely at television sets. Now I did.

We crossed Surf Avenue and I walked Sandy to the rambling white-and-green Nathan's Famous for coffee. It's open all day and night and the long wooden open-air counters were full of customers.

We sat near a man with tattoos on his arms, who was eating a plate of clams with horseradish and hot sauce.

"Will you look at those clams nowadays?" I said. Sandy looked. "They're grey. Mother Nature made them pink, which is how I remember them. The oil industry went and made them grey."

"C'mon, let's go to the Hell Hole," Sandy said. "You want to save clams from going grey and the ocean from getting oilier, it's going to have to wait until you save some poor innocent victim from Picasso back in the city."

We finished our coffee and rounded the back of Nathan's to Bowery Avenue, which runs through the amusement park. We passed the Eldorado Arcade, Sportland, Faber's Fascination, the Silver Ski, and Treasure Island. I pointed out the Thunderbolt to Sandy and the old frame house beneath it, and George C. Tilieu's Steeplechase beyond that, and the Stillwell Avenue Baths with the terra-cotta snails and pelicans and seashells and a scowling Neptune.

In the midst of it all, not far from the Unicef Pavilion, where the song "It's a Small World After All" played over and over in the early-morning emptiness of the park, stood Picasso's masterpiece, the dark maze called Hell Hole.

"My God, I don't know what to say." Sandy covered her mouth with her hand. "I've never seen anything so violent or so fascinating. Hock, this stuff is for kids and families? I can't believe it."

It was just as Rizzo said it would be. A kind of phenomenon. Sure, I'd seen the painting, like millions of kids had. Glimpsed it, mostly the female nudes, but something inside me, something on automatic, had made me avoid noticing the total effect of the piece.

Beginning at the top-right-hand side of the dark and narrow doorway was a satanic figure feeding epsom salts in solution from a bottle to men seated on overflowing toilet commodes. Below this, nude women in chains drank from tubes connected to the men above and they, too, were seated on commodes that drained into a brown river full of gagging, drowning men. At the top left of the doorway, another satanic figure played a piano from sheet music that read "Andante Shake & Hammer Blow Struck." Rising from the top of the piano were huge hands that controlled chains shackled to twisting men, women, and children. And presiding over this mad montage was a white-haired devil who twisted an enormous tail between his long legs as a woman below stroked its pointed end and lesser devils crowded about her.

The paint was chipped and dull from the winter's salt air. In a

fenced area beside the dark maze, it appeared that pieces of Picasso's work had been removed and were being refurbished for the summer season upcoming. Two German shepherds guarded the art inside the fence, which was topped in barbed- and razor-wire. A masterpiece had to be protected. Picasso would be pleased.

"What do you make of it?" I asked Sandy.

"If there's a statement to this thing, intended or otherwise, I guess it's that we're creatures feeding on our filth and cruelties." She thought about what she'd said for a moment and looked from the blue ocean out beyond the park and the beach back to the monstrous painting called Hell Hole. "And I think most of us, for better or for worse, spend most of our lives ignoring it until it's too late."

By twilight, Picasso had yet to leave his vacant building. I knew this because Neglio had agreed to put a team of uniforms on foot post near the only way to get in or out of the place, the crack behind the garbage bin.

I stood with the uniforms for most of the afternoon. About eight o'clock, I decided to go up to my place for coffee with Sandy and maybe a sandwich. On the way, I looked up the side of the sealed-up tenement where Picasso lived in his own dark maze and thought I saw him in his beret, at his window, laughing at me, but I wasn't sure.

At my own window, I drank coffee and talked with Sandy but I couldn't tell you a word that passed between us. I was more intent on watching the night fall.

Then I heard a faint popping sound. If the idea wasn't in the back of my mind, I might not have noticed the surprisingly faint sound of gunfire.

I ran down the stairway, shouting, "I should have known! I should have known!"

When I reached the back end of the old tenement house, the uniforms had just pulled the garbage bin away from the crack in the wall. I slipped inside first and the officers followed me. "Careful on the stairs!" I called out in the pitch dark. Three flashlights sliced through black as we mounted the stairs, floor by floor.

I kicked open Picasso's door.

By a half instant, I anticipated what in fact now faced us. One of the uniforms fell back against me and said, "Oh, my God in heaven."

In a beam from one of the flashlights, maybe mine, I saw a note

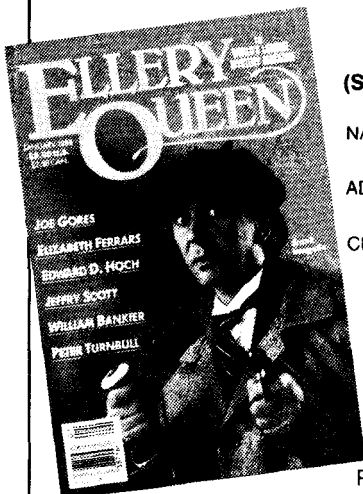
Picasso had pinned to the top of the canvas. Picasso himself was slumped on the paper-strewn floor below it, a pistol in his hand.

The note read: "My whole life, I never topped what I painted at Coney Island. Until now."

The canvas was no longer blank. Picasso had evidently stood in front of it, put the pistol to his head, and fired. The canvas was now red and grey and wet. And titled *Self-Portrait, in Brains*.



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The poker games all followed the same pattern. Sometimes a professional cheat heard about them and moved in for the easy pickings. Other times one of the regular players became bitter at his constant losses and changed his luck with the help of a card mechanic. It was usually just a matter of time . . .

DON'T PLAY WITH STRANGERS

by **CARL MARTIN**

When I returned to Bradleyville after an absence of twenty years, I never spoke about where I'd been or what I'd been doing. I knew that even hinting about my past would be foolish. The residents of that sleepy little farming community would have been shocked.

But it's hard to be silent when you see a friend doing something that has a potential for disaster. That's why I said, "Don't play with strangers," hoping Marty would hear the concern in my voice.

Marty Bass and I had been high-school buddies. His wife Mary and I had gone together until she realized I had itchy feet and there was no future in it. Their farm covered over a thousand acres—two full sections—of the richest land in Illinois. They were my neighbors and my only friends.

The life I'd been leading made even a casual friendship impossible. Now that I could be a friend, I was determined to be a good one. I couldn't keep silent. When you know every twist and turn of a dangerous highway, you try to prepare a friend for the treacherous curves that lie ahead.

Marty told me about the poker game held every Friday night except during the harvest—just a few local farmers and shopkeepers spending a relaxing evening with cards and conversation. However, I'd heard of hundreds of such games over the years. They all followed the same pattern. Sometimes a professional cheat heard about them and moved in for the easy pickings. Other times one of the regular

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players became bitter at his constant losses and changed his luck with the help of a card mechanic. It was usually just a matter of time.

I hoped that day would never come, but I was certain it would. The only thing that surprised me was its speed.

On Saturday morning two weeks after my arrival, my dog woke me up, barking at Marty's pickup truck pulling into the front yard. I pulled on a pair of jeans and went outside, rubbing the sleep from my eyes.

I hadn't had much rest, but it was clear Marty hadn't had any. He was still wearing his town clothes from the night before, and they were wrinkled badly. He was usually smiling and in good spirits, but now he hung his head like a whipped dog. "I don't know what I'm going to tell Mary," he said in a flat tone, "I lost everything last night."

"Everything?"

"All the harvest money. Over forty thousand dollars."

"Then you still have your farm," I said, trying to find a bright side.

"Not for long. I have a note coming due at the bank. There's no way I can pay it now."

"Who was the big winner?"

"Tom Lambert," he said, naming the bank manager. "Tom has been losing for years. I always told him his luck was bound to change. It was just my tough luck it happened when I had more money than brains."

"Who else was in the game?"

"Just the regulars, and Tom's cousin Andy from St. Louis."

He must have read something in my expression because he said, "I know what you're thinking and you're wrong. There wasn't any funny business. It was an honest game. Hell, I was over five thousand ahead before Tom suggested raising the limit so he'd have a chance to get even. And Tom never won on his own deal."

I didn't tell him con men always let a sucker win at first, then take it all back while he's feeling confident. Although Tom Lambert may not have won anything when he was dealing the cards, I was sure he'd done very well when his "cousin" held the deck.

"Let's get some coffee," I said, leading the way inside.

While Marty told me about the game and the string of second-best hands that had cost him all his cash, I did some thinking. Tom

Lambert's bogus cousin had probably already left town with his share of the winnings. In any case, I couldn't prove anything. No one could. If Marty was going to get his money back, I'd have to do it for him.

I dressed for town quickly, then returned to the kitchen where Marty sat staring gloomily into his coffee. "Call Mary so she won't worry," I said. "Tell her you had to come over here to help me with something. Then wait for me to get back."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to get your money back," I said.

I got lucky. I spotted Tom Lambert going into Andy's diner when I turned onto Main Street. I parked my car and followed him inside. He was sitting alone in a rear booth, but looked up when I entered, wearing a smug, pleased expression, like a cat who has just tasted feathers. He *always* had a speculative look in his eye when I was around. I had paid cash for my place outside of town. My tailored shirts, Italian silk suits, and dime-thin gold wristwatch awed him, too. Lambert was the kind who was impressed by signs of success. Perhaps it was because he'd never had very much himself.

I walked back and took a seat across the table from him. "You don't mind if I sit here, do you?" I said. Then, after the waitress had taken our orders and left, I said, "I want to talk some business."

"I didn't think *you'd* ever need a loan," Tom said in a feeble attempt at humor. "I thought you printed your own money."

"I do," I said, looking him in the eye as I said it.

"Do—? Do what?"

"I print my own money."

He looked confused for a second, then he laughed. "That's a good one. For a minute there I thought you were serious."

"I am." I took out my wallet and placed five crisp new twenty-dollar bills on the table in front of him. "I made these."

He glanced down at the money, but he didn't touch it. "I've been in the banking business for twenty years," he said. "I handle currency every day. Don't you think I know real money when I see it?"

"You should, but apparently you don't," I said disdainfully.

He looked at the bills again. This time he picked one up and snapped it between his hands. He examined the portrait carefully. Then he picked up another, and another. When he had checked the last one he said, "Genuine. All perfectly genuine."

"No," I contradicted. "I made them." I lined them up in front of

him again. "These bills all have one huge flaw that marks them as counterfeit," I said. Then I leaned across the table. "They all have the same serial number. Real money always has different numbers."

He looked down at the bills and his jaw dropped open. "They *are* counterfeit!" He snatched up two of them and held them to the light. Finally, he set them back on the table. "I've never seen such good counterfeit. They look so real."

"When I print them with different serial numbers they're almost undetectable," I said.

"Then why not do it?"

"I usually do, but I wanted you to know how good my product is. And what it is. If I made them perfect, you'd think they were real and that this is a con game. These defective bills are merely samples."

"Samples?"

"Is there an echo in this room?" I asked, making a show of looking around.

The waitress brought our order. Lambert could hardly contain himself until she left. "Does this mean you want to sell some?" he asked anxiously.

"You're quick," I said. "Bet no one's told you that before."

He ignored the insult. "How much do you charge?"

He had taken the bait. Now I had to set the hook and reel him in. "Twenty-five cents on the dollar," I said.

"For counterfeit! That's high, isn't it?"

"Not for what I'm selling, it's not. You can see for yourself how good it is. Interested?"

You bet he was interested. Before we finished eating, I'd agreed to sell him five thousand dollars' worth, all with different serial numbers, and he was talking about buying more later.

"Okay," I said. "Let's meet back here in three hours. You bring your money and I'll bring mine."

I drove down to the river and parked under an elm tree. While I waited, I thought about how easy it is to trick someone like Lambert. He was smart and knew it. He'd received proof of his cleverness when he took Marty's cash. Now he thought no one could put anything over on him.

After an hour and a half, I went into action again. I called Lambert at his home from a phonebooth.

"Look," I said breathlessly, "something's come up. I have to leave town right away."

"What about our deal?"

"We can still do business, but it'll have to be quick. Either that or it'll have to wait until I get back in six months."

"I don't want to wait."

I didn't think he would. He'd had an hour to think of ways to get counterfeit into circulation. His position at the bank would make it easy for him. He saw himself making a large, fast profit. "Okay," I said, "I'll meet you in front of the bank in half an hour. You hand me your package and I'll give you mine." Then, almost as an afterthought, I asked, "How much cash can you put your hands on that fast?"

"Fifty thousand, maybe. Why?"

"I've a large—uh—inventory, and I don't like to carry it with me when I travel. Half a million in twenties and fifties. I'll let you have it for the fifty thousand. That's ten cents on the dollar."

I didn't try to push him any further. I let his greed do it for me. Twenty minutes later, I pulled to the curb in front of the bank. Lambert hurried out and handed me a package the size of a shoebox. I handed him one that was considerably larger and drove away quickly.

After giving Marty the money he had lost, I still had a small profit for my trouble. By then, of course, Lambert had unwrapped the telephone books I'd handed him and knew he'd been tricked. But I had nothing to fear. He wouldn't go to the police. He wasn't going to tell anyone he'd tried to buy counterfeit money.

I would accompany Marty to the bank when he paid off his loan so Lambert would know why I did it. But he'd probably never figure out *how* it was done. I could picture him going to his grave positive I had shown him counterfeit currency.

Not many people know you can take several bills with consecutive serial numbers and turn them into bills with the same number. All you have to do is remove the last digit with a soft eraser. It's easier to do than most people imagine, and if the bills are new it doesn't leave a trace.

"Q"

a **NEW** short story by

JAMES POWELL

"Mr. Tabori, is that really you?" Darwin Cutler asked.

"Hey, call me Zoltan, okay?" said the apparition. "There's nothing like driving a stake through a guy's heart to put you on a first-name basis, right?" Then he added quickly, "Ah, take it easy. I've got no bone to pick with you. Look." The ghost of Zoltan Tabori took a swing at Cutler. The punch passed through the left side of Cutler's face and came out the right. All the young man felt was a chill in his teeth.

"See?" said Tabori. "Couldn't hurt you if I wanted to. You did what you thought you had to. You rid the world of a bloodsucking monster, right . . . ?"

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

by **JAMES POWELL**

Gruff thunder shook the night sky as the headless skeleton sprinted around the corner and up the street of sleeping houses. Rain was coming. As the bones flashed between a wild hedge and up the short front walk of a small Victorian house, a smell as bitter as old curtains filled the darkness. From the safety of the porch, the skeleton turned and, with rib cage heaving and crossed ulnas, watched the rain arrive like a waving stand of silver wheat under the lamppost at the curb.

Darwin Cutler watched the rain with an amused eye. Cutler belonged to an informal club of joggers who, from preference or necessity, ran at night, sprinting from all over Halifax to meet around midnight in the downtown cemetery behind the Public Gardens and

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do their laps there. Most lived farther away than Cutler and would arrive at their front doors sopping wet.

Because of their meeting place, the joggers had taken to calling themselves "The Quick and the Dead." When Pauline Denny, a brassy number who jogged to lose weight, showed up one night in a dark outfit decorated with a skeleton of bones done in silver reflecting-tape for safety's sake, her idea was quickly copied by the others. Pauline worked in the hairdressing shop in the Lord Nelson Hotel and dreamed of opening her own place. She already had private customers she cared for in her free time. She came every two weeks to do Cutler's mother's hair. As a matter of fact, when he came to think about it, he was the one who got her interested in jogging. She'd liked him a lot. Mother said she'd set her cap for him.

Cutler felt cold. He turned from the rain and unlocked the front door quietly so he wouldn't disturb Mother. Drying his hair with the towel he'd left on the small table where they set the mail, Cutler started up the stairs to his room. The amber shade on the landing gave out a small light.

He was almost on top of the thing on the stairs before he noticed it. The outline was sharp enough. The figure seemed to be that of a medium-sized man sitting on a step. But the surface of the head and body fluttered like a flag of many greys blown by a dark, gusting wind that Cutler could not feel. He pinched his nose between his eyes and shook his head decisively. No, he didn't believe in ghosts.

"Heck, Darwin," said the figure on the staircase in a tired voice, "a month ago you didn't believe in vampires, either."

"Mr. Tabori, is that really you?"

"Hey, call me Zoltan, okay?" said the apparition. "There's nothing like driving a stake through a guy's heart to put you on a first-name basis, right?" Then he added quickly, "Ah, take it easy. I've got no bone to pick with you. Look." The ghost of Zoltan Tabori took a swing at Cutler. The punch passed through the left side of Cutler's face and came out the right. All the young man felt was a chill in his teeth. "See?" said Tabori. "Couldn't hurt you if I wanted to. You did what you thought you had to. You rid the world of a bloodsucking monster, right?"

"Mother said it was our ethical duty," said Cutler, who felt safer somehow now that he could make out the familiar porkpie hat resting on Tabori's knee.

"And how is Mrs. C?" asked the thing on the stairs with a slight upward toss of the head. "There's one real cultured lady . . ."

Cutler's mother was always getting up these discussion groups among her acquaintances with topics like "Beethoven, the Weimar Years" or "Tintoretto and the Decline of Venice"—evening get-togethers that started small and lost members rapidly. Cutler was often called on to supply fresh bodies, a feat that was sometimes easier said than done. Mother's friends had fled from "E. M. Forster, the Man and His Vision" in droves. Cutler couldn't remember what had prompted him to invite Tabori, a Quick and the Dead regular. The man accepted with pleasure. "I'll be there loaded for bear," he said.

On the evening in question, Tabori showed up wearing plastic clip-on sunglasses over his regular lenses. "I've got this thing about bright lights," he explained. Cutler's mother seemed at once amused by the man and doubtful about his suitability as a group member. Tabori was clearly taken by her, however.

And why not? Cutler's mother was a trim woman with delicate, animated features and charm to spare when she wanted to spare it. But during the discussion, Tabori sat there looking more and more puzzled.

Finally, when Mrs. Cutler called on him for his contribution, he'd said, "Boy, is my face red. I don't know this *Passage to India* guy from a hole in the ground. My guy wrote all those Captain Hornblower books." Mrs. Cutler raised a chastening eyebrow before moving on. But after, when everyone was socializing with their allotted glass of sherry, Tabori worked his way over to her and started a conversation.

When Cutler came around offering the bowl of walnuts, he heard his mother exclaim, "Seven languages, Mr. Tabori! How did you ever learn seven languages?"

"Hey," laughed Tabori, "when I got out of high school, I said to myself, 'Zoltan, what say you see if you can't travel all the way around the world without putting a foot in a country with a cross in its flag?' So I did just that. Crazy, right? I mean this was way before the *Guinness Book of Records*. And I stayed a couple of years here, a couple there, and picked up the lingo as I went."

"I bet that's helped you in your work, Mr. Tabori," said Cutler's mother.

"Not right off the bat," said Tabori. "That first winter back in Canada, I worked night watchman on the Lake estate. You know the Elliot Lakes?"

"Indeed I do," smiled Mrs. Cutler. "I went to convent school with

Mrs. Lake—Bunny Petrie as she then was. That was a long time ago, long before Darwin's father squandered everything and reduced us to this pretty pass. I'm not what I used to be, Mr. Tabori."

"You look great to me, Mrs. C," he replied.

Later, when everyone had gone, Cutler started closing up the folding chairs and emptying the ashtrays. Cutler liked this part best, for his mother would now help herself to another sherry and rehash the evening, mimicking every voice, quirk, and gesture, hooting over the drivel that passed for thought. But that night she said, "An odd customer, your Mr. Tabori. Ever try to pin him down on what he actually does? I finally got him to say he was in international commodities-trading. That's why he works nights, when the foreign exchanges are open. I asked, 'You mean you're in Hong Kong pork bellies and Singapore zinc futures?' Close enough, said he. And did you catch the part about traveling around the world skipping countries with crosses in their flags? That kind of gets you thinking, doesn't it?"

"Sure does," lied Cutler.

His mother looked at him and smiled sweetly. "Let's see more of Mr. Tabori," she said. "Let's invite him to join the Wells group." Every other Wednesday evening Mrs. Cutler and a few others, like poor Mrs. Meers, met for a chapter-by-chapter discussion of H. G. Wells' *The Outline of History*.

Cutler's job as day steward at a private curling club prevented his attending. Wednesdays he worked right through to closing time to give the night steward his day off. When his mother was mad at him, she'd call him an unglorified short-order cook and barkeep. But Cutler didn't mind the job. The hours weren't long, though sometimes when some fussier members wanted a game after lunch he'd have to go in at nine to set their stones out on the rink so they'd be the right temperature by playing time.

Tabori often attended the Wells get-togethers in his jogging outfit and waited afterward—talking to Mrs. Cutler, who now called him "dear Mr. Tabori"—until Cutler got back from work so they could make their run in the cemetery together. Mrs. Cutler reported herself baffled by Tabori's ignorance of the great events of history but amazed by his intimate knowledge of everyday life in the past.

One day after work, Cutler found his mother in the living room deep in a stack of library books of the older sort, with buckram or

leather bindings. "Vampires?" he laughed incredulously, reading a couple of spines.

"Remember the peasants in the Dostoyevsky the group read last year and how they always bowed toward the corner with the icon in it when they entered a room?" asked Mrs. Cutler. "Well, Tabori always does this little thing when he comes in here and now I know what it is. He's turning his back on the wall mirror." She mentioned other peculiarities about Tabori and showed her son places she'd marked in the books with pieces of paper.

When Cutler'd read them all, he was puzzled. "But I thought we didn't believe in vampires."

"It's been my experience that the bugbears of this world are never as bad as they're made out to be," said Mrs. Cutler. "Besides, considering the abominations we find ourselves faced with on every side today, a vampire might prove to be an amusing breath of fresh air. I think I may just take Mr. Tabori in hand."

Cutler's mother enjoyed working people through their hangups and fears. Poor shy Mrs. Meers was a fidgeting chatterbox until Mrs. Cutler took her in hand, insisting they go to concerts where people would shush her or stare. Mrs. Cutler once told Darwin she had never felt as close to the brotherhood of man as she had with Mrs. Meers sitting in rigid agony beside her and biting on an empty glove to keep from bursting during Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. As a boy, his mother had put him to many a test, too, like curing him of his fear of things that lurk in the dark after lights out. She hadn't wanted him to end up a cowardly suicide like his father.

After the next discussion group, Mrs. Cutler said, "Dear Mr. Tabori, unless I'm mistaken—and you have been a bit vague on the subject—you live in the vicinity of Scappini's grocery store down by the harbor. This Sunday I'm making a dish that calls for mortadella—isn't that a morbidly wonderful name for an edible? My big lummoX of a son never gets to that part of town. Would it be too much to ask you to pick up a quarter pound for me?"

"Hey, no trouble, Mrs. C.," said Tabori, honored to be asked to help. "I'll bring it by tomorrow night when I stop for Darwin and the jogging, okay?" But when Tabori arrived with the mortadella in its brown-paper package, his face was a terrible green mask. They made him lie down on the sofa.

"I'm allergic to garlic," he explained as Mrs. Cutler applied a wet facecloth to his forehead. Mrs. Cutler commiserated. "Oh, poor dear Mr. Tabori, and Scappini's is just festooned with garlic over the meat

counter, isn't it?" Tabori raised a corner of the facecloth to stare at her with one hard eye. Then the eye softened.

Mrs. Cutler was as sweet as pie with Mr. Tabori after that. Before long she asked him if he'd mind stopping at the Birks store on Barrington some night and pick up a purchase she'd made. Tabori was delighted.

"Please unwrap it and put it over there on the fireplace mantel, dear Mr. Tabori," she said, pretending to be busy elsewhere as the man made his peculiar entrance into the living room, shifting the blue box from one uneasy hand to the other. But she was watching as he reached in among the tissue paper.

Tabori howled like a man who'd grabbed hold of a red-hot poker as he pulled the silver crucifix from the box. His eyes rolled upward and he spun around, hitting his head on a corner of the mantel. He fell to the floor, blood oozing from a cut above one eye. Now when Tabori first started coming to the house, he'd given Cutler a card with a phone number on it. "Look," he'd said, "I used to get these fits, like what-do-you-call-it, epilepsy. It's ancient history, but just in case here's where you call. Ask for Raymond."

Raymond arrived, a soberly dressed man of forty with an uneasy, put-upon manner. He looked at the seedy gentility of his surrounds with mild contempt and was not impressed by Mrs. Cutler's cultured noises of distress. Cutler helped the man carry Tabori down to the hearse parked at the curb. But when he came back into the house, he found his mother biting her lip with real concern.

"Darwin," she said, "I hope we haven't made a big mistake here. You know what I mean?"

"Yes, Mother," lied Cutler.

Tabori's cut wasn't serious and he was soon running with the Quick and the Dead again. For a while he refused all pleas to come back to the Cutler house, but at last, like a moth drawn to a flame, the lonely Tabori accepted an invitation to dinner. Mrs. Cutler met him at the door to coo over his funereal bouquet. He found the living-room mirror covered by a cloth. Soon he, Cutler, and Cutler's mother were toasting each other with sherry. Still Tabori was uneasy. His nose rummaged in the dinner smells for a trace of garlic and his head craned around to find the crucifix.

Mrs. Cutler understood. "The cross has been returned to Birks," she said, although in fact she'd stuck it down between the cushion

and the arm of her easy chair in case the man turned violent. "I regret that nasty business. But it told us what we wanted to know. You're a vampire, dear Mr. Tabori."

Tabori started up from his seat, protesting, "You can't pin that on me."

Mrs. Cutler persisted. "You weren't born and raised in Canada, were you? You've lived many lifetimes stretching far, far back in history."

"You're talking crazy," said Tabori. "Let me out of here." But he didn't move.

Mrs. Cutler looked up at him. "Believe me, the —uh—bloodletting aspect doesn't offend us," she insisted. "My son and I are hardly conventional types. Tell us how old you really are, dear Mr. Tabori."

Tabori stared at her from behind his dark lenses. Then a small smile started and he rubbed his modest chin. "Hey, now I get it," he said, sitting back down. "Sure, I'll tell you. I'm five hundred and twelve years old and still going strong." Now words pent up inside too long came tumbling out. "Let's get something straight first off. We call the bloodletting aspect 'imbibing,' okay? And I never take much—like a pint. So maybe the imbibee feels a little dragged out the next day, but that's all. And here's a hard-and-fast rule. I never mix business with pleasure. I never bother the folks I socialize with. That's nix." Tabori emphasized this point by exing the air with his index finger. Then he continued.

"What I do summers is I find open windows. Winters, it's travelers sleeping on their baggage at the airport. Or derelicts sleeping in whatever warm they can find. And with them, I always tuck a little something in their pocket—like a ten or a twenty. Believe me, people don't know how lucky they are to have a roof over their heads."

"Hold on," demanded Cutler. "Don't those people become vampires, too?"

"No way," insisted Tabori. "We're not talking about catching a head cold here. And it isn't hereditary, either. My old man used to tell me it started with the Mongols, who drank the blood of their horses on forced marches when they invaded Europe. So it's what's called an acquired characteristic. But we don't proselytize." He said the word with slow care and smiled when he'd accomplished it. "That's why we're a dying breed. At least we would be if we died, which we don't in the normal course of things. Look, I could teach you the imbibing part. There's a knack to it. It's like smoking. You

get sick the first couple of times, but then you'll feel great and you'll live forever."

Cutler looked at his mother. Was that it? Did she want them to become vampires?

Then Tabori said, "I'm just a guy who loves life more than the average gent." He looked away and added quietly, "If you wanted, it could be you and me until the end of time, Mrs. C."

"Oh, dear, Mr. Tabori," laughed Mrs. Cutler. "I'm afraid you misunderstand. Heavens, no, I don't want to live forever. I have no desire to endure any more than my share of this long slow slide into mediocrity which we see on all sides, this great leveling of all the mountains of genius that have gone before us."

Tabori cocked his head to peer down the road into the future. "That bad, huh?" he asked.

"There's no doubt in my mind," she answered. "But you, Mr. Tabori, you've had the luck to live through the golden age of Western civilization. You've walked the streets with our great artists and thinkers. Oh, I understand this mask of banality you wear. The vampire calling must require a private kind of life. You have to hide your wisdom from the Great Unwashed. But your secret is safe with us, Mr. Tabori. Let us sit at your feet and drink in the wise words you bring from the glorious past. Tell us all, please, dear Mr. Tabori."

Cutler's mother folded her hands in her lap and waited expectantly.

Tabori talked through two more sherries, dinner, coffee, and brandy. He was still talking when Mrs. Cutler closed the front door behind him, leaned back against it, and let the fixed smile drop from her face. Tabori had been in London in Shakespeare's day but had never gone to any of his plays "because, take it from me, all those theaters across the Thames were firetraps. And, okay, I didn't go out much. I don't have the calves for tights." He had once ridden in a stagecoach with Voltaire from Lyons to Villefranche and all he had to say about it was, "Boy, those Frenchies are real cards." He visited Vienna in 1805 and might have heard Cherubini conduct his own music, but hadn't because "I'm kind of tone deaf," he said. "But I'll tell you this. I saw Napoleon and he was short, I mean *short* short."

Mrs. Cutler straightened up and, in a voice trembling with rage, said, "That man was given the priceless gift of living through the most exciting centuries of human existence. And if you ask him what it's taught him he says, 'It's a great life if you don't weaken.' "

Mrs. Cutler screwed up her face and shook it in disgust. "Darwin," she said, "I've told you that one day I hoped that you, unlike your father, would be able to perform some heroic act untrammelled by sentimentality or convention."

"I know you have, Mother."

"Darwin, that day has come. I want you to kill this human leech. You must search out his coffin by day and drive a stake through his heart."

Darwin shuffled his feet uneasily. "But, Mother, I don't even know where Mr. Tabori lives."

The receptionist at Shady Acres Funeral Supply ushered Cutler in to Mr. Raymond Simms at once and closed the door behind her. Cutler found himself alone in a small, windowless room dominated by a heavy workbench, on which lay a large grey shape that most resembled a mummy case. It seemed to be made from old newspapers. Cutler took a few steps into the room. Then he stopped and put down the gym bag with the mallet and wooden stake in it.

The large grey shape on the workbench had a top and bottom half which were not quite closed together. Curious, Cutler moved forward. There was a transparent porthole in the lid up at the head. It was fastened shut with a buckle like those on overshoes. Cutler thought he could make out something through the porthole. He leaned closer and saw a sleeping face. But even as he watched, the eyes sprang open, wide and wild.

Cutler cried out and jumped back as the lid flew open and something inside sat bolt upright. "Tah-dah!" it shouted triumphantly.

Cutler had turned and bolted for the door, but one foot stepped on the gym bag while the other caught in the handles and he fell to the floor.

Raymond Simms, dressed in grey coveralls, swung his feet over the edge of the workbench and jumped to the floor, chuckling. "The future always scares the hell out of you overbred types, Cutler," he said, patting the shell from which he'd just emerged. "Meet the shape of coffins to come, the biodegradable sarcophagus."

"Understand, this is just the demo model. The real thing won't break in two. No, we wrap the remains in sheets of newspaper—the newspaper of choice for decedants who have the forethought to specify. A weak paste of flour and water is then applied. Then more newspaper and more paste until we reach the right thickness, when the whole thing is dried with electric heaters. We end up with an

airtight, water-resistant shell which can be gilded or bronzed or treated with any number of imaginative designs and colors. And it's all been calculated so that both the container and the thing contained turn to dust together."

"Even the glass in the porthole?" demanded Cutler grumpily. He was back on his feet now and anxious to find a flaw in the man's design.

"Isinglass," boasted Simms, "a biodegradable fish byproduct. If I can find a way to tint the damn stuff pink, we'll save a fortune on cosmetics. Of course, the porthole buckle'll be stainless-steel and gussied up with name, dates, and epitaph. The Memorial Buckle, we'll call it. Yes, sir, this little honey's going to knock the whole undertaking business on its—"

Here Cutler interrupted. "We've got another little matter to take care of," he said, pulling the mallet and stake from his gym bag.

Simms understood. "That's okay by me," he said. "I've been meaning to tell Tabori to find other quarters for a long time now. But your way's better. The guy might have made a stink. And my big mortician investors would vanish into the woodwork at any hint of scandal." Simms stepped out of his coveralls, took a jacket from the coat rack, and looked Cutler up and down as though amused by what he saw. "In a stake-and-mallet play, you strike me as the stake guy," he said. "All right, I'll do the mallet shot."

Then he turned and left the room, talking over his shoulder to the scowling Cutler as he went. "My dear old dad made me promise on his deathbed I'd go along with his deal with Tabori. My dad was a lowly mortician's assistant whose specialty was giving the stiff a Mona Lisa smile. Then along came Tabori and bankrolled him in his own business. Oh, Tabori's got a real stash hidden away somewhere. The pot of gold at the end of some dark rainbow, eh? But that's history as far as I'm concerned. I've got my own big-money people now. For God sake, if a deathbed promise to your own dad isn't coercion, what the hell is?"

The Shady Acres Funeral Supply garage and warehouse was an old greystone building down by the harbor. The freight elevator lifted the two men up from the ranks of polished hearses, past acres of rolled-up artificial grass and awnings and enough sad bunting and decorations to handle World War II. They stopped at a floor of crated coffins.

Simms led Cutler through them to a narrow staircase up to an

attic door. He pulled out a key, leered at Cutler, and warned, "Tabori's a light sleeper."

The door swung open into utter darkness. Simms played the low beam of his flashlight around the floor, revealing an attic heaped with plastic flowers and crowded with a forest of portable doric columns, a damned garden through which a crooked path worked its way.

"Why's it dark?" demanded Cutler. "I mean, don't vampires stay in their coffins until sunset?"

"Sometimes Tabori walks in his sleep," said Simms. "What's the matter? You afraid of the dark or something?" He laughed and started down the path. There was a fluttering overhead.

Cutler remembered the night they'd confronted Tabori. Cutler, his old tennis racquet at the ready under the sofa just in case, had asked him if he could really change himself into a bat. "That bat-imitation stuff's a lot of hooey," Tabori had insisted. "But my uncle could rub his palms together and make them quack like a duck." Now Cutler wished he'd brought the tennis racquet along. Suddenly the air from a passing wing-beat brushed his cheek and he cried out.

"Pigeons," hissed Simms to shut him up. "They get in. Who knows how?" As he spoke, the two men came to a clearing. Simms' flashlight picked out the coffin next to a bedside table with a fringed shade. Nearby stood a floor lamp with a matching fringed shade, an overstuffed easy chair, a coffee table with a small television set and a pile of newsmagazines. "Actually, I shouldn't have let him do this," whispered Simms. "This area isn't zoned residential."

Cutler was trembling at the knees and his palms were wet as Simms led the way to the coffin. Simms put an ear to the lid, listened, and shook his head. "Say," he wondered, motioning into the darkness at Cutler's back, "what if he's out there?" Cutler spun around. But when he felt Simms' mocking gaze, anger overcame Cutler's fear.

Unzipping the gym bag, he turned back around and drew out the instruments of vampire death. He handed the stake to Simms and gestured with the mallet for the man to take an end of the coffin lid. They lifted it off in one smooth motion.

Tabori was sleeping like a baby inside, clad in tasseled loafers, burgundy slacks, and a polyester sportscoat with a pink window-pane check in it. The familiar clip-on sunglasses were in the breast pocket and the hound'stooth porkpie hat rested on his chest. A plastic clock-radio nestled in the crook of one arm. Cutler ground his teeth.

How could he ever have let this bland-faced man with the characterless chin terrorize him?

He signaled to Simms to position the stake. Tabori sighed like a restless, dreaming child when the point touched his heart. Cutler raised the mallet. He struck three times to drive the stake through Tabori's body and each blow made him feel better than the last. When it was all over, he found he was humming Brahms' "Lullaby" through clenched teeth.

Then Simms found the long pole that opened the papered-over skylight and they trundled the coffin into the merciless sun of noon. Tabori's white skin browned quickly, like paper under a burning glass. Then the face turned black and twisted up as though in malicious laughter. In the next instant, Zoltan Tabori had been reduced to a fine white ash and only his clothes remained.

Cutler leaned back against the banister. "What's it like, life after death, Zoltan?" he asked the thing on the stairs.

Tabori's sadness deepened. "You mean here? What can I say?" He sighed as though the task of hunting up the words was wearing beyond measure. "Well, it's dark. I mean *dark* dark—and flat as a pancake in all directions. And there's this hard, cold wind. When your eyes get used to the darkness, you see this vast grey crowd of people stretching as far as the horizon and lumbering slowly this way and that way. And my people are on the fringes of the crowd, herding."

"You mean vampires?" Cutler's voice was hoarse with comprehension.

Tabori nodded. "Don't get me wrong. It's no big deal to be a herdsman. Maybe it's a punishment. I mean, we aren't really herding them anywhere. It's like they go this way and we have to make them go that way. And then when they're going that way we make them go this. We thirst, but when we imbibe from the herd the blood is grey and thin, a feeble brew. They moan wearily and get weaker, but we don't grow stronger or quench our thirst."

Tabori sighed over the effort it took to describe things. "Look," he said, "the whole place is bathed in this kind of crazy washed-out light. Remember the trees in the cemetery, how they turned silver in the moonlight when the wind sprang up, or those TV nature shows where the stampeding reindeers' coats flash when they turn? That's where the light comes from here. It's fear that makes it, the

herd's fear when they see us coming, ours that the next imbibing won't be any better than the last."

Tabori's voice was drifting away. "Darwin," he said urgently, "there's no pep in the stuff we imbibe here because the herd's so grey and, you know, anonymous. Believe me, if I had Raymond Simms here, boy, could I imbibe from him with relish, let me tell you. He took my money and he betrayed me. He broke a sacred deathbed vow. Darwin, you don't owe me any favors. But I'll make a deal with you. There's this casket filled with diamonds and emeralds. Believe me, when you think you're going to live forever, you put more aside for a rainy day than the average guy. Promise you'll kill Simms for me and I'll tell you where the casket's buried."

Cutler listened to the very end. Then he watched until the last flicker of Tabori had vanished from the staircase. If he'd wanted to, he could have dug up the casket and walked away. But he enjoyed thinking of himself as a man of his word. Besides, the murder plan had sprung into his head just like that.

It'd be easy. He'd call Simms and hint that he and his mother might just mortgage their house to invest in the biodegradable coffin. He'd arrange a meeting after business hours for another demonstration. When Simms got in and closed the coffin, Cutler would jump up and sit on the lid. Then he'd open the porthole and they'd have a little talk. First he'd tell the guy where he was going to send him and who'd be waiting for him when he got there. Then Cutler would see how Mr. Simms handled fear. And when Cutler was damn well ready, he'd buckle down the porthole and sit there swinging his legs in space until the man's last desperate scream steamed up the isinglass.

Nine headless skeletons ran through the cemetery darkness. Eight kept in a pack, their arm bones working up and down in unison. The ninth, the headless skeleton with the halo-headband, lagged behind. Pauline Denny's mind wasn't on her jogging. She was still thinking about the news in the morning paper. Next to the headline FREAK ACCIDENT SUFLOCATES FUNERAL SUPPLY EXECUTIVE was another in smaller type that caught her eye: LAKE ESTATE PROWLER SHOT.

The night watchman on the suburban estate of Mr. and Mrs. Elliot Lake, the art collectors and philanthropists, had shot and killed a prowler. According to the authorities, the watchman, a recent Russian emigre, was dozing in the guardhouse at the gate when a man in a porkpie hat appeared to him in a dream and told him in excellent

Russian that a lunatic armed with a rifle had intruded onto the grounds in the vicinity of the marble gazebo. Waking with a start, the watchman had hurried to the spot with pistol drawn, and in the shadows found a man pacing like a soldier with a rifle sloped over his shoulder. The watchman called out to him to stop and raise his hands. He fired when the intruder spun around and started to lower the rifle, which afterward turned out to be a shovel.

Pauline shook her head. She'd always liked Darwin, though not as much as he liked her. What the hell was he doing on the Lake estate at night with a shovel, anyway? But what rotted her the most was having to offer Mrs. Cutler her condolences. God, she detested that woman and the high-and-mighty garbage she mouthed when she was getting her hair done. There was one little neck that would be easy enough to wring. Still, she was a regular customer and a fair tipper. Every little bit brought closer the day when Pauline's House of Hair Fashion would open its wonderful doors.

Pauline slowed. A shoelace had come undone. She went down the three stone steps that separated the two levels of the cemetery. Then she turned back and put her shoe up on the second step to retie it. That was when she saw the whirl of darkness sitting there beneath the large decorative vase overflowing with greystone fruit.

"Darwin?" she asked uncertainly.

"Don't be afraid," came Cutler's voice, and his big face fluttered like smoke in a wind she couldn't feel. "I can't hurt you. You're looking great, Pauline. You haven't changed a bit."

"It's only been twenty-four hours, Darwin."

The face turned incredibly sad. "God, is that all? I feel like I've been running this way and that, this way and that, for ten years at least," he said wearily. "It's all just like Zoltan—like Mr. Tabori—said it would be. I've got to call him Mr. Tabori now. I heard him call my name in the darkness as soon as I got there."

"'Darwin,' he said. And I was afraid. That's when I could see him and the smile on his face and his hand on Simms' throat. But he let Simms go as soon as he saw me. I was the one he wanted. He imbibes, Pauline. There's this tired kind of life here. It's not much, but it's all we've got. He drains mine out of me. He takes what little I have and he enjoys it and he laughs."

"Zoltan was always such a nice man," said Pauline.

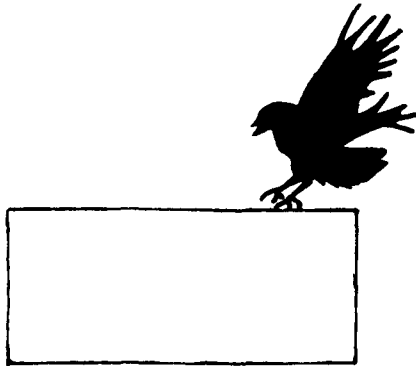
Cutler's mouth trembled and turned down at the corners. "There's no 'nice' here, Pauline. Just Mr. Tabori imbibing, imbibing, imbib-

ing. I begged him to leave me alone. I pleaded. Finally we made a deal. Pauline, listen. I've got this big, big favor to ask.

There'll be a casket of jewels in it for you. I'll give you the directions from the gazebo. Oh, I know you wouldn't do it for the money, but maybe you'll do it for that something special we had between us."

"What do you want me to do, Darwin?" she asked drily.

The question seemed to hurt. Cutler's face twisted with pain and ghostly tears stood in his eyes. "Pauline, Mr. Tabori says he'll leave me alone if I get someone to kill Mother."



STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Title of Publication: Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine Publication No. 00136328 2. Date of Filing: October 1, 1987. Frequency of Issue: Every 28 days; (A) No. of Issues Published Annually: 13; (B) Annual Subscription Price: \$19.50

4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.
5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers (not Printers): 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor: Publisher: William F. Battista, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Editor: Eleanor Sullivan, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Managing Editor: Eleanor Sullivan, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

7. Owner: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Davis Communications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: NONE.

10. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 273, 048; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 18, 458; (2) Mail Subscription: 195, 750; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 214, 208; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means: Samples, Complimentary and Other Free Copies: 627; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 214, 835; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 3, 451; (2) Return from News Agents: 54, 762; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 273, 048.

Actual Number Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 271, 919; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 19, 000; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 193, 339; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 212, 339; (D) Free Distribution by Mail Carriers or Other Means: Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 360; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 212, 699; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 5, 465; (2) Returns from News Agents: 53, 755; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 271, 919.

I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

LAURA GUTH
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR, SUBSCRIPTIONS

a **NEW Jemima Shore story by**

ANTONIA FRASER

Deadly doings on a remote island is not a new concept to mystery fans, but it is an engaging one. Antonia Fraser has assembled an interesting cast of characters for "Cry by Night," which appeared last year in London's Woman's Realm. This is its first publication in the U.S.

The Mystery Guild will feature Antonia Fraser Month this coming February with a dual main selection of the author's new novel, Your Royal Hostage (Atheneum), and Jemima Shore's First Case and Other Stories (Norton), a collection that does not include "Cry by Night" but which Publishers Weekly called "Strikingly different, each a satisfying shock," adding: "Fraser's star turn is the drama played 'On the Battlements.'" (EQMM, June 1987) . . .

CRY BY NIGHT

by ANTONIA FRASER

“I heard it again last night. That woman wailing down by the sea.” Martha James was in the act of pouring herself some more coffee from the tall black Thermos. As she poured, her face under its veil of streaky fair hair was hidden from Jemima Shore.

“She sounded so unhappy. Not like a real live woman at all. I think it’s a ghost.” Martha’s tone was purely conversational: she might have been commenting on the lights of a fishing boat seen at night, the wind which had arisen at dawn (and since dropped), or just mentioning with renewed delight the even sunshine now spreading across the terrace of the Villa Elia.

Then Jemima looked at Martha James’s hands and saw that they

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were shaking. The coffee she had visualized being poured confidently into the huge blue-and-white breakfast cup was in fact being splashed into the saucer and onto the rough tablecloth.

"Martha," exclaimed Jemima with alarm, taking the Thermos away from her, "you're really upset!"

Martha James stared at her for a moment. The impression given by the long straight hair and the slim figure, clearly visible since she was wearing a pink T-shirt, cherry-colored bikini bottom, and nothing else, was of youth—athletic youth at that. The legs were firm and muscled as well as brown. But Martha, when you looked into her face, was not really young at all. There were fine lines, a good many of them, round her eyes, despite the tan. It was the face of a middle-aged woman. This morning she also looked quite haggard. Or frightened.

Suddenly Martha smiled. She took the Thermos back from Jemima, saying ruefully, "What a mess! Irini will murder me. Bad night, I'm afraid. And then that—crying, I suppose it was. Kept me awake for hours. A cup of coffee is definitely the answer. If I can somehow get it into the cup."

"Have a fresh cup." There were still a few unused ones on the long wooden table which served for all their meals on the terrace.

"A fresh cup and a fresh start. Most appropriate to this holiday." Martha sat down and began drinking composedly. The moment of anguish, fear, or whatever it was, had evidently passed. Jemima decided to forget the incident, despite her own slightly unruly curiosity—the quality, after all, which had made her into a television investigative reporter. She had other more urgent matters to preoccupy her.

She thought instead about the subject of fresh starts. It was, as Martha had observed, appropriate to the holiday and, for that matter, appropriate to Jemima's own presence on the island of Corfu.

The party staying at the Villa Elia, situated just above a small beach beside a rocky headland, was not exactly a party in the strict sense of the word. That is to say, according to the hostess, Alice Garland, none of the guests had been known to her in advance. They were also all paying—quite heavily—for the privilege of being there in the first place. That included Jemima Shore herself (although Megalith Television, her employer, would end up picking up the tab). The important point was that she was receiving no reduction, despite the handsome offers made by her hostess.

"But you really needn't pay! Not the whole amount, at least. After all, if you *did* make a program about our little party venture, it would be the making of us!" Alice Garland had sounded appealingly wistful in London. But then she nearly always did sound wistful, Jemima decided. Even in her London clothes—checked jacket, white silk blouse, and short black skirt—Alice had the air of an elegantly dressed doll. She certainly looked too young and virginal to be running her own business, despite having a husband—somewhere. No further details given. At the Villa Elia itself, straight hair falling, she looked a positive infant. It was, in fact, the same kind of pretty light-and-dark hair as Martha's and the two women were not so dissimilar in type. Alice's face was, however, genuinely youthful. Standing beside her, Martha looked a rather weary echo.

Long before she reached Corfu, Jemima had appreciated that there was nothing notably childish about Alice Garland's business methods. Alice was quite determined to make her so-called Fresh Perspective Holidays a success, but Jemima fancied that Alice could probably show herself quite ruthless if the occasion offered. She was in business in London and Corfu, competing with a number of tour operators, not by offering cut prices—far from it—but by offering a holiday of a rather special type.

Fresh Perspectives, as advertised, were for those who felt themselves to be at a turning point in their lives—it might be marital, professional, spiritual, or all three. Whatever its nature—with which Fresh Perspectives was not concerned—"guests" took advantage of some weeks at the Villa Elia for contemplation. There was only one theoretical condition: guests were supposed to arrive solo. Spouses, lovers, companions, mere friends were not officially welcome.

"And if a fresh perspective happens to include encountering a fresh partner at the Villa Elia?" Jemima had asked Alice.

"Naturally it happens," Alice had replied in her soft little-girl voice. "At least I presume it happens, human nature being what it is. We wouldn't know, of course. Most people don't sleep in the house, only the officially elderly or infirm, people who might have some difficulty making their way to the various guest houses scattered about the property at night. And we don't get many of those, as you will see. But in any case, one of the things which prevents the burgeoning of Fresh Perspective romances, even in this day and age, is the fact that far more women than men seem to want to come."

Alice smiled enchantingly. "I suppose it means that far more women than men need to make a fresh start in life," she added.

"It may mean that," commented Jemima drily. "Or it may simply mean that more women than men have the courage to realize it." Was there perhaps something smug about this elfin creature, with her husband and her rapidly expanding business? You couldn't imagine Alice Garland herself needing to make a fresh start—but if she did, plenty of people would want to help her do it. Alice was one of those people who had the effect—consciously or unconsciously, Jemima had yet to decide—of arousing a kind of hero-worship in those around her—or just a desire, quite simply, to be in her presence. Jemima had once or twice surprised Martha James, for example, gazing at Alice with a kind of yearning. And another of the guests, a somewhat older woman called Mrs. Vascoe, was inclined to try to engage Alice in earnest private conversation whenever possible.

Looking at Martha now, Jemima wondered precisely what kind of turning point it was that she had reached.

Martha was a painter. Jemima recognized the name, although she hadn't heard of her work for some years. Was that the problem? Waning fame? Waning inspiration? At the Villa Elia, it was in any case a camera not a sketchbook which was generally to be found in her hand. And Jemima had happened upon Martha once or twice taking photographs in the maze of paths bordered with rosemary and other odorous shrubs which led among the various cottages. You stopped on a path, turned, and there was the cerulean sea below you, framed by rocks. The views sprang up, fell away, emerged, vanished, in seemingly artless fashion, until you gradually realized that the vistas of the Villa Elia, like everything else to do with it, must have been planned.

If Martha was not to be found painting or sketching, another of the guests had recently started to parade a sketchbook. This was an American girl in, say, her early thirties, called Felicity Dalbo, but known at her own request by the nickname of Fizzy. As Martha might be surprised with her camera, Fizzy could be seen, rather more ostentatiously placed, in the center of a popular path with her sketchbook. Fizzy was actually Alice Garland's greatest fan. If Martha followed Alice about—sometimes—with her eyes and Mrs. Vascoe requested little chats with her, Fizzy was publicly loud in her admiration for everything Alice did or said.

"This villa! Isn't it something?" she exclaimed several times a day. "How I wish I could get it all together like Alice—maybe I *will* when I've been here long enough!"

The results of Fizzy's artistic labors had a slightly primitive air. The bright-blue shutters of the villa, actually folded flat against the white-washed walls, sprang out at you in Fizzy's watercolor as though with an energy of their own. They were also way out of scale. All the same, Jemima found Fizzy's various efforts not unpleasing. Like Fizzy herself, they conveyed a certain indomitable cheerfulness. Jemima was a good deal more doubtful about Fizzy's habit of producing her latest sketch at lunchtime.

"Go on. Criticize it. You can say whatever you like—I want to learn, damn it," Fizzy would say, smiling eagerly at one of the other guests. Fizzy, it was quite clear, was not a professional painter, nor was her turning point-to-be supposed to concern art. In any case, Fizzy herself had left no doubts on that score.

"Bad marriage," she had announced to the company at the pre-dinner drink session on the day of her arrival. They were drinking a delicious local white wine called Boutari (with the exception of Martha, who always drank water). "Or, rather, a good marriage to a bad guy. 'Fizzy Dalbo,' I said to myself one day, 'you just don't have to live with this man any more. The compromises you've been making are just not acceptable for a woman in the Eighties. It's yourself you have to live with. That's the bottom line. Learn how to do it, why don't you?' So here I am." Fizzy gave a wide smile, displaying her large and even white teeth. It was the beauty of the teeth, thought Jemima, more than anything else, which revealed Fizzy's transatlantic origins. Fizzy herself had been working for some English publisher in London. And Fizzy's unsatisfactory husband had, it seemed, been English.

"Not a reticent character," had been Martha James's comment to Jemima after Fizzy, a large tote bag over her shoulder and a fresh glass of Boutari in her hand, had swept off to unpack.

"It's so wonderfully tranquil here, isn't it?" murmured Sarah Halliwell rather nervously after a short silence. Sarah was a gentle girl, dressed in a green-and-gold shirt of Indian design, with thick, shining hair coiled at the moment but which, loose, reached to her waist. She obviously had some Indian blood: the mixture of Indian and European had produced in her a lovely, delicate bone structure which put even Alice Garland's physical neatness to shame.

But for all her elegance, Sarah had a haunted air. To Jemima,

she spoke briefly of "a betrayal where I had least expected it. Perhaps with hindsight I should have done so."

"A fresh perspective was certainly necessary in my case," Sarah ended. Jemima forbore to ask any questions. She was, after all, looking for ideas, not material. Were she to decide to include some film of the villa in her planned series (tentatively entitled *Possible Dream? Starting All Over Again*), it would obviously not be this party she dealt with.

But she did note that Sarah spent a lot of her time reading abstract-looking journals with titles like *Classical History* and *Graeco-Roman World*. She also, alone of the party, spoke some modern Greek. For Sarah Halliwell, at least, the choice of a Greek island like Corfu for her repose did not seem to be a coincidence.

So far, Martha had not been asked to give an opinion of Fizzy's work, despite her professional qualifications to do so. Perhaps it was unfortunate, thought Jemima, that Fizzy chose the lunchtime following Martha's nerve-wracked coffee drinking to do so.

The conversation certainly got off to an uncomfortable start—besides which, there was undoubtedly an element of rivalry or jealousy between Martha and Fizzy over the subject of Alice, all the stronger because it was generally unspoken.

"Fizzy, that's my cottage you've been painting," exclaimed Martha abruptly. "Well, I think that's quite a—" She stopped. The missing word was not going to be a pleasant one. Liberty? Yet once again Martha looked frightened, or at any rate more upset than angry.

"Why, Martha—" Fizzy gave a good-humored pat to Martha's thin brown arm—"I'm sorry. But you know me, I go everywhere just looking at it all, loving it all. I certainly didn't mean to invade your space. I understand your need for privacy. Hey, I'm like that myself. We're all like that here. It's just that your cottage being on its own—farthest from the house on that cliff over the beach with the headland on the other side of the bay. You were out—"

"How did you know I was out?" Martha asked. But before Fizzy could answer with another long explanation, Martha seized Fizzy's sketchbook and made a rapid and not unkindly assessment.

"For an amateur, and I take it a beginner, it's not at all bad." Martha even managed a rather strained smile. "I wish I had your freshness."

"Fresh Fizzy, into Fresh Perspective. Thank you, Martha. Thank

you very much. And to show you I mean it, I promise I'll never come and paint near your cottage again, in spite of the glorious view, not even if you beg me. I won't come near it, not even if you start calling out for help in your lonely cottage in the middle of the night."

But Martha merely lit a cigarette—she was the only guest who smoked and she made up for it by smoking quite a lot—and moved away. After a while she sat down in a basket chair slightly apart from the others which commanded the best view, at least from the terrace.

The branches of an olive tree—one of the many from which the villa took its name, *elia* meaning olive in modern Greek—framed the exit to the pathway which wound down to the beach. The blue, blue sea lay beyond. Pots of plumbago with its bright-green leaves and profuse pale-blue flowers flanked the exit. Everything at the villa, from cushions to flowers, had some kind of blue theme—chosen perhaps for repose, or to remind you of the ever present sea below, stretching out to the horizon.

"My favorite color—blue," Alice had announced on Jemima's arrival.

"A cold color—too many blues make a house heartless," Jemima's decorator friend Daisy had once said. But of course that warning judgment could not be true in Greece, on the edge of that sea.

"Talking of crying out in the night," said the fourth guest, Betsy Vascoe, conversationally, "did anyone else hear that owl or cat or dog or whatever howling again last night? Down by the beach."

She spoke from a basket chair which was rammed up against the lunch table. Being the sort of apologetic person who always chose the least comfortable chair in the worst position, Mrs. Vascoe, in her staid summer clothes, had an altogether old-fashioned air. When she said things like "all you young things," nobody, not even Martha, sought to contradict her. "Alice runs this place with such youthful efficiency" was her frequently heard paeon of admiration.

Now there was a crash of glass as something fell heavily on the marble-flagged terrace. Jemima looked in the direction of Martha. But Martha, still with her back to the company, smoking and looking out to sea, had not moved.

"I'm so sorry!" exclaimed Mrs. Vascoe, jumping up as if personally responsible for the accident and beginning to dab away at the pool of white wine on the floor with her white shirttails. But it was Sarah Halliwell's glass which had crashed, not hers.

At the noise of the crash, Irini, the Greek cook, came springing out of the kitchen and, moving slightly despite her formidable bulk, quickly and expertly cleared it up.

Alice Garland appeared at the same moment. She had the air of being about to go shopping: she had a basket over her arm and wore a big Greek straw hat.

"Hey, Alice," cried Fizzy. "Is there some kind of ghost here that hoots or howls? Betsy heard it last night. Some of us heard it the other night. Bright idea coming up: maybe it's the ghost of our various pasts trying to stop us making a fresh start. Howling at us."

"Did anyone else hear this howling last night?" asked Alice pleasantly. "Jemima? Fizzy? Sarah?"

Sarah shook her head. "Not last night." Nobody else said anything. "Martha?"

"I heard nothing last night," Martha replied without looking around.

"So it seems you were the only one disturbed, Betsy," concluded Alice. "But then, your cottage is closest to the sea. As a matter of fact, it's a bird—a local bird. But to the imaginative—" she smiled in Mrs. Vascoe's direction—"I suppose it could sound like a woman."

"Oh, Alice, I wasn't complaining," said Mrs. Vascoe hastily. "I'm probably quite wrong about the whole thing."

A fresh start for Betsy Vascoe should certainly include learning how to stand up for herself, thought Jemima. She understood that Mrs. Vascoe was recently widowed. Jemima guessed her late husband to have been a man of strong character. Reflecting that Mrs. Vascoe spent a lot of time studying guide books to Corfu and was the only member of the party who actually ventured to the museum in the town, Jemima forgot her and concentrated on wondering why Martha James—so preoccupied with the "wailing" at breakfast—had suddenly denied hearing it at lunch. Besides, Alice was wrong—the closest cottage to the sea was not Mrs. Vascoe's, it was Martha's.

Before Alice could say anything more to Betsy, reassuring or otherwise, Irini, now laying the table for their usual cold lunch of stuffed vine leaves, taramasalata, and salad, said something raucous in Greek.

Alice frowned.

"What did she say?" asked Fizzy—and, when Alice still frowned, "Sarah?"

Sarah Halliwell glanced carefully at Irini, who laughed back at

her. "She says we are too many women here. We are needing a man. So someone here is calling out for a man in the middle of the night."

Irini nodded vigorously and added something else.

"She says *she* needs a man, too." Irini roared with laughter. So far as could be ascertained, Irini, like Mrs. Vascoe, was a widow—there was no sign of a husband, and a son, Nikos, helped her with the work of the villa which could not be done by the maid, Maria. He also operated the boat. Actually, Nikos, despite his youth, was altogether a much less imposing figure than the substantial Irini, with her fine, strong features and mass of greying hair.

"You need a man, Irini my love, you got a man."

The voice—male, of course—was so unexpected, coming as it were out of one of the rosemary bushes on the path, that it seemed to Jemima that all the women on the terrace jumped. Afterward, she would come to revise that opinion: all the women had jumped except one.

A minute later, a man appeared coming up the path from the sea. He was tall, almost burly, dressed incongruously in dark-grey trousers and a dark-grey jacket. His white shirt was open at the neck and there were signs of a tie hanging out of his pocket, its end trailing. His hair was golden-brown, very curly, rather long. His complexion was ruddy rather than brown, or perhaps that was the effect of sun on his kind of rather florid good looks. For he *was* good-looking, even if at the same time he gave the impression of having gone to seed.

The man before them was not carrying a suitcase, or indeed any kind of bag, but his shoes—leather brogues rather scuffed—were in his hand. He had evidently come off a boat onto the beach below. It was perfectly possible to arrive at the villa like this: in fact, it was easier than using the precipitous narrow path winding its way through olive groves down from the village, the journey taking about thirty minutes altogether. Luggage and other supplies were as a result generally brought in by Nikos' boat from the next-door bay.

("I suppose Nikos is really the power behind the throne in this place," Sarah Halliwell had observed thoughtfully on the subject of the handsome, silent Greek youth. "Being in charge of the boat and all that, he's really the only one who can come and go as he likes, night and day.")

"Then Irini is actually on the throne," answered Alice with a light laugh.

"Oh, no, Alice, *you're* on the throne." That was Fizzy. Really, thought Jemima, she went too far sometimes.)

Elia beach itself was not, of course, private, all beaches in Greece being public by law. But since access to it was in effect only by boat (you would have to know the area well to discover that entrance to the village path), tourists only congregated there in the middle of the day. Very occasionally, an intrepid couple slept over amid the pebbles and were noticed by Jemima if she had a pre-breakfast swim.

At the moment, the happy cries of the said tourists could be heard as a background to the strange scene of arrival on the terrace. How different were sounds heard in the bright shadowless sunlight of the day! Could the cry-by-night have been merely an ecstatic nocturnal tourist? There were some ecstatic ones, and some loudmouthed ones, too. There were some ecstatic sunbathers as well—topless ones, some brown and shapely, pagan nymphs fitting into the Greek landscape. Some, it had to be said (like Fizzy, who alone of the party sometimes went topless), neither brown nor shapely, who should not have risked the exposure.

"Kirie William! So you do come!" cried Irini with much enthusiasm, launching herself on the stranger and embracing him with fervor.

At roughly the same time, Alice said: "William!" in a voice which contained not even the pretense of welcome. "What are you doing here?"

"Like all the rest of you, my dear Alice, making a fresh start. And with quite as much reason, I think you'll agree." He bowed to them all. "William Gearhart—at your service."

"William"—Alice paused—"William is my husband."

In contrast to her chilly tone, William Gearhart's was positively ebullient. "Do I get some lunch, Irini? No, wait a minute, what I really want is a drink. Don't worry, I can pay my whack—or, rather, my whackette. What's she charging you these days?" he inquired at large as he pulled at his pocket, producing the rest of the tie and a lot of soggy-looking drachmas in rather small denominations. As Irini hastily brought forward bottle and glass, Jemima realized that what William Gearhart's flushed look really signified was not the beginning of a tan, but the end of a drinking bout.

It was tempting to regard the arrival of William Gearhart at the Fresh Perspectives "house party" as being disruptive: people united in a desire for a quiet life found themselves unwillingly plunged

into a more lively situation. But had there not been strains all along, beneath the surface of the party, Jemima wondered? The mysterious cry-by-night (as Fizzy would have it, "our pasts calling out to us"), did that carry with it a warning?

As she reflected, William was busy greeting Martha with a special flourish.

"Martha James! The famous painter. The once and future famous painter! No more naughty—whoops!" Gearhart clapped a hand over his mouth.

"William!" Alice's self-control sounded as if it might be slipping.

"It's all right, it's all right, I've said nothing. Are you painting anything hereabouts, Martha? I should be most interested to see your latest work. Or are there any *old* paintings to be seen?" He gave Martha a look which was almost a leer.

It was with the helpful air of one smoothing over a difficult situation that Fizzy said rather breathlessly: "Well, I guess I'm the only working artist round here, and I'd just love to get some fresh perspective on that—"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Gearhart, we've met before, as you may remember. Sarah Halliwell from the Graeco-Roman Institute." Except that she had virtually interrupted Fizzy, Sarah sounded not only gentle as ever but absolutely composed.

"The beautiful and brilliant Miss Halliwell! Now, how could I forget you, or anything about you? Why, I wonder, are you here? But I mustn't be a tease. She won't like it. My dear wife Alice. Alice Garland as we must call her." He sat down rather heavily and gazed with some surprise at the glass before him, now empty.

"Can I stay?" he asked, rather pleadingly. "I have to talk to you, Alice. About *business* matters. You know what I mean." He counted the guests. "There must be an empty cottage if you don't want me in the house."

"You can stay," said Alice. But Jemima had the distinct impression that she was agreeing more to stop her husband talking further than for any more hospitable reason. Her pretty face had formed into a formidable frown at the mention of the word "business."

"Thanks," William said. "Actually, I don't want any lunch. And I don't want any dinner, either. Just sleep. And later maybe a swim. I'll see you all tomorrow morning. And I'll be very, very good."

After he had lumbered away—to the cottage next to Jemima's—Alice took a deep breath and faced them.

"How can I explain? And you were supposed to be having peace. William was, is, my husband. That is, we're separated, not divorced. I took the name Garland instead of Gearhart for business purposes. Yes, William does need a fresh perspective. You see, he once owned a gallery for selling antiquities. There was some trouble. I won't go into it. Some of them weren't quite what they seemed to be—fakes, in short. Some of them turned out to have reached England unlawfully, by a rather odd route. I won't go into that, either. There was a case. William was acquitted. But, of course, his reputation suffered. And at the same time our marriage broke up. It didn't—how can I put it?—it didn't survive the strain of something like that. The gallery had to close. He's had a hard time."

She paused. "And so, in a way, have I. I've tried very hard to build up Fresh Perspectives, in some ways, as a kind of therapy—but I'm not asking for your pity."

Unexpectedly, Mrs. Vascoe was the first to speak after Alice finished. "Thank you for being so frank, my dear. You know how much we all admire what you're doing here. And I'm sure we can all sympathize with someone who has gone through a hard time. In our different ways, so have we."

"How true," murmured Sarah, touching her brow with her handkerchief. "It is hot, isn't it? I don't think I want any lunch, after all. I'll go back to my cottage and lie down for a while."

As she departed, Fizzy gazed after her gracefully swaying figure vanishing among the rosemary bushes. "So she knew him." Fizzy sounded puzzled, as though working something out.

That night, Jemima could not easily get to sleep. The cicadas, usually soothing, sounded almost too loud. Dropping off for a brief moment, she decided they were trying to tell her something, but awake once more, she knew that to be mere fancy. All the same, even her favorite lullaby of the sea pounding the shore below was more disturbing than restful tonight.

Somewhere—on one of the other cottages or was it up at the house?—a shutter banged heavily. They were all supposed to fasten their shutters at night to prevent this. Jemima decided to ignore it and pulled the pillows over her head.

Dinner had been a subdued affair, for all Irini's delicious lamb roasted in the Greek manner. No William Gearhart and no Sarah, either, for that matter. The latter, like William, had remained secluded since the pre-lunch scene on the terrace. Jemima thought

again about William Gearhart's arrival and Fizzy's remark, gazing after Sarah's retreating back: "So she knew him." She thought about Martha James: "I heard the woman wailing." A local bird? A bird called cry-by-night? She drifted once more toward sleep.

Either the banging shutter or some other noise woke Jemima. This time she knew from her clock that she had been asleep for some time.

Feeling that she had awoken at the end of the noise, whatever it was, Jemima jumped up and looked out of her bedroom window in the direction of the sea. Her view of the shore, either from her bedroom or sitting room, was obscured by some of the olive trees.

Was that someone down there on the shore or merely the shadow of a rock? It was impossible to be certain at this distance. The beach was predominantly pebbled, but the headlands on either side had left a deposit of fallen rocks and stones, some of them quite large. A flickering light or the flashing of fishing lights out to sea? Irini told them that Nikos regularly went night fishing, like the other men living round about. Was that a boat? But from inside her cottage, Jemima couldn't see the stone pier running into the sea where Nikos usually kept his boat.

Rather gingerly, she stepped out onto her little terrace. Someone was waiting below—a cat, a dog, a bird? Or sheer imagination in the shadowy post-midnight world, the so-called dead hour of the night?

The soft, warm darkness was opaque. Only the cicadas kept up their ceaseless chatter, and far below the sea rushed relentlessly to and fro on the beach.

Up at the house, Jemima was surprised to notice that the terrace light, generally left burning, had been switched off. Equally surprising, the lights of Fizzy's cottage were burning, not just the bedroom light, but the light of the small sitting room as well.

And the banging was coming from the direction of Fizzy's cottage.

After a moment, surprise gave way to a reluctant but undeniable feeling of alarm. Jemima took a look round toward the other cottages. William Gearhart's was dark. She expected that—she had seen no lights there at any point during the evening, either when it began to get dark before dinner or later, on her return. A fresh start meant sleeping it off. Yes, indeed—as far as Jemima was aware, Gearhart had been quite comatose since he lumbered away before lunch.

The small light over Sarah Halliwell's terrace was still burning, but the rest of the cottage was plunged in darkness. That, too, was to be expected. Sarah always slept with the terrace light burning—unlike Jemima, who feared for the insect life the light might attract.

"There are the other things to fear beyond insects," Sarah had murmured. "As a matter of fact, I don't like the dark very much, if you want to know. Childish, I daresay."

Jemima could only glimpse the roof of Mrs. Vascoe's cottage or where she imagined it to be. No pool of light there, however. Martha James's cottage, in its isolated position, could not be seen at all. Fizzy's words came back to her: "If you call out for help in the middle of the night—" It was an uncomfortable realization under the circumstances that Martha's cries for help would not be heard by the rest of the guests—that is, if they were safely installed in their own cottages.

Why was she thinking about Martha? It was Fizzy's cottage that should be occupying her thoughts.

Was she to investigate? The correct answer was yes. Otherwise, the restlessness might continue till dawn, with the addition of a faint nagging guilt. Not that she seriously thought anything was wrong, but all the same, she would investigate.

Once the decision had been reached, the taking along of a torch seemed a practical plan, un fanciful and thus reassuring. She hardly wanted to cause her own incident by falling off one of the steep paths into the bushes, let alone down a cliff. Jemima located her flashlight, remembered that the battery was low and that she had forgotten to do anything about it, put on her flip-flops, pulled her cotton robe closely round her, and set off.

Halfway down the path, the torch petered out. Jemima sighed. On the one hand, she could return (but she had still not switched on her own terrace light). On the other hand, the lights of Fizzy's cottage beckoned—even if she would not quite have put it like that. Jemima decided to keep going.

There was no more wailing from the beach, no other sound but the occasional bang of the vagabond shutter ahead and the persistent chirruping of the cicadas. Her strongest sensation at this point was, in fact, of smell: the rich scent of rosemary, oregano, and sage.

Jemima reached Fizzy's cottage and peered through the open French windows. The little sitting room with its simple blue-and-

white furnishings was demonstrably empty. No one could have hidden behind that white cane chair or sofa, let alone beneath the tables, smothered in Fizzy's books.

Should she go further? The shutter banged again and she realized that the sound was at the back and it must be a bedroom shutter. That decided her. Jemima, useless torch in hand, advanced. The bedroom, like the sitting room, was virtually bare. Certainly no one was hiding in there. Jemima saw twin beds, both empty, one with its blue-cotton cover rumpled, the other untouched. She saw—

At that moment, the door behind slammed and all the lights in the cottage went out. Fumbling desperately in the darkness for the switch, Jemima found to her horror that she was grasping flesh, wet clammy flesh, somewhere directly behind her. She screamed.

The light was switched on as suddenly as it had been extinguished. She was not touching flesh exactly—or not flesh unattached. What she was touching was a human hand.

"Why, Jemima Shore, I do declare!" exclaimed Fizzy in a palpable exaggeration of her usual drawl. "What are you doing here? I saw someone going in. I guess I thought—"

"Where were you?" Fear and surprise had made Jemima angry—unreasonably so. Fizzy, after all, had a perfect right to come and go as she pleased in her own cottage. She added more politely, by way of an explanation: "Your shutter was making rather a racket."

"I'm sorry." Fizzy looked down at herself. She was wearing a damp towel robe and, it appeared, not much else. "I've been treating myself to a late swim." She looked round the cottage. "I have some coffee in that Thermos. Irini knows I'm a nocturnal animal. And I've an idea for a moonlight watercolor. Would you like some coffee?"

Jemima hesitated. "No, coffee keeps me awake," she explained. It was a decision she was to regret later. Even at the time, she felt a pang at seeing how dashed Fizzy looked at the rejection of her invitation.

As Jemima turned to go, Fizzy said, "There's something special I'd like to talk with you about. But I guess the morning will do."

It was too late to turn back. Jemima contented herself with a friendly wave of the defunct torch. Her last sight of the American girl was as she sketched a friendly salute back.

It was only after Jemima reached her own cottage that she realized she hadn't questioned Fizzy about the wailing on the beach. Had she

heard it? She must have heard it if she'd been swimming. If the wailing had existed in the first place.

Ah well, Jemima would make an opportunity to ask Fizzy about it first thing in the morning.

But Jemima never did make an opportunity to ask Fizzy about the subject in the morning. Because next morning at breakfast, the whole scene was dominated by the discovery of the body—the sodden body lying on the beach at the end of the water like a piece of abandoned wreckage, moving slowly from time to time with the movement of the sea, a dark and melancholy shape in the pristine sunshine of the bright new day.

The body, turning in the water at the edge of the sea, was first discovered by Irini's son, Nikos, returning from one of his mysterious night-fishing trips.

Thank heaven, thought Jemima, he'd been there. Otherwise, one of the guests at the Villa Elia, taking an early-morning swim, might have happened upon it. For that respite at least, they should all be devoutly thankful. It was illogical, the fact of death being as terrible and tragic whoever first stumbled upon the pathetic, water-logged corpse. But under the circumstances, Jemima was still grateful it had not been anyone actually staying at the villa. They all needed to remain calm and rational if any sense was to be made of the whole horrifying business. To say nothing of when the local police arrived.

Quite early, Nikos had been heard calling from the beach to his mother up at the villa. It was a sound that for an instant gave Jemima a curious flash of recognition. Cry by night? Could that be the odd wailing noise which had disturbed Martha and maybe awakened her, too, in the hours of darkness? Then the appalled expression of Sarah Halliwell swept that thought temporarily aside.

Sarah, alone among the guests who understood modern Greek, was listening to the shouts from the shore.

"He's saying it's a *body!* *Someone's in the water!* He's saying—Kiria? No, I don't believe it!" Sarah swayed slightly and gripped one of the big terra-cotta pots at the edge of the terrace for support. "Alice! He's telling his mother it's *Alice* lying down there. There are injuries—her head. Something about the rocks!"

But it was the weeping, the terrible weeping, and the stream of passionate but incomprehensible Greek lamentation from Irini which brought it home to them that Alice Garland was actually dead.

Irini raised her fists and looked up at the famous unclouded blue sky of Corfu. Blue—Alice Garland's favorite color, the theme of the Villa Elia—seemed to mock her. Jemima had seen Alice as ruthless maybe in business, heartless perhaps in her private life (although she had greeted her disgraced husband's unexpected arrival with some generosity, pleading for his temporary acceptance in her little speech). Now Alice was no longer in a position to be either ruthless or forgiving.

"Little Alice," began Fizzy in a voice of bewilderment. Her heavy features crumpled and Jemima had the impression she was about to cry.

The arrival of William Gearhart on the terrace at this moment brought Jemima back to a sense of unwelcome reality. Irini, cries temporarily abandoned, was heading toward the path, apron askew, arms still outstretched. So far as Jemima knew, none of them had seen William since lunchtime the day before. Certainly she had not, and as for the others, that was something that could be checked, if not at the present moment.

He looked urbane and rested, his face still rather flushed, but the impression given this morning was of the flush of health, not the unhealthily ruddy hue of too much drink. He was wearing a clean white tennis shirt and dark-blue swimming trunks, despite the fact that he had arrived with no luggage. The shirt was slightly strained over his broad chest. Stock supplies at the villa? His own clothes left over from happier—and slimmer—times?

"Good morning, all." He not only looked but he sounded urbane. "I'm all ready for a fresh start this morning. My God, I'd forgotten the delicious aroma of all those shrubs we planted as you make your way up the path. Fresh coffee now requested for my fresh start, Irini—" He stopped. "What's going on here. You all look as if someone just died." The words faltered in the face of the shocked expression on Sarah's face.

Irini halted in midflight and grabbed William's hand. "Kirie—" and she jabbered at him in Greek with gestures toward the shore. Someone had joined Nikos down there—another man, presumably Greek. Together they were lifting the body from the pebbles where Nikos had originally laid it and heading slowly for the villa path.

"You poor man," said Mrs. Vascoe swiftly, before anyone else could interrupt. "I'm afraid this is going to be a terrible shock to you. But there's been some kind of accident. Your wife—"

"Alice! No, I don't believe it!" They were the words Sarah Halliwell

had spoken only a short while before. But William, unlike Sarah, did not sway. He began to shout, or perhaps rave might have been a better word. In his own way, he was almost as incomprehensible as Irini had been. The words to his appalled listeners—Fizzy, Sarah, Mrs. Vascoe, and Jemima—began to make a certain grisly sense.

"Martha! Why did you come here? Why didn't you leave her alone? Fatal Martha James! Fatal, fatal, fatal! Unlucky to me! Unlucky to her! Martha, where are you?"

All the time the somber procession, body now wrapped in some kind of tarpaulin, could be seen winding its way up the path to the villa.

"Martha's always late for breakfast, she's always the last to come," said Sarah Halliwell.

"Maybe I should go and tell her," said Fizzy. "What a terrible accident."

"Accident! Was it an accident?" To their general horror, William began to shout once more.

"I'll get Martha," put in Fizzy swiftly.

It was not necessary. Before Fizzy could move, Martha appeared on the terrace. Jemima noted she was holding a lighted cigarette in her hand, although she didn't generally smoke before breakfast. A moment later, Nikos and his companion, with their shrouded burden, reached the crest of the path and they all realized at once from the look of her that there was no need to tell Martha anything. She must have watched the procession coming up the path. Her face, like Irini's, was already streaked with tears. Before the mesmerized eyes of the assembled company, she sank on her knees beside Alice's body and bowed her fair head down upon it. Even more shocking was the way she burrowed into the dark covering to produce one white moist hand and to kiss it with passionate abandonment. "My Alice! Little Alice!"

Then Jemima looked at Martha with new eyes: saw the straight, fairish hair hanging down her back, framing the curiously wizened face with its unexpected crop of lines fanning out beneath the deepening tan; Martha's girlish hairstyle and girlish slimness. But Martha James was not the girl; that was Alice Garland. Jemima looked from Martha to Alice's prostrate form, the pale, wet mermaid hair now falling free from its covering in strands.

Martha and Alice: "My Alice! Little Alice!" Jemima thought of William's railing against Martha, as yet imperfectly understood.

Might that hatred have its origin in the most primitive kind of jealousy and dislike?

Jemima stepped forward and touched Martha on the shoulder. "I think I understand," she said. Then, putting her arm protectively round Martha's shoulder, Jemima helped her to her feet and away from the body.

"Well, *I* don't understand." Fizzy's voice was loud and indignant, her expression, again childlike, a mixture of misery and crossness. "I don't understand at all. We're talking about an accident, aren't we? Are we getting the doctor? I've got a lot of questions to ask."

"My dear Fizzy," Mrs. Vascoe spoke gently. "We've all got a lot of questions to ask. And, for that matter, I expect one or two questions will be asked of us. In the meantime, surely we must all be as cooperative and *self-controlled* as possible."

Sarah nodded strongly. So did William. It was clear that he did not consider the words could possibly apply to him.

There was no telephone at the Villa Elia. Telephones were hard to get in Corfu, it seemed, and precarious when they were installed. Jemima remembered with a pang how Alice had spoken merrily on the subject: "It's one of the many good points of the villa. When you come to film it, you'll find it so peaceful without a telephone. Not really very awkward once you adjust to it. For urgent calls, you just go up to the village and chance your luck. Since that is such a time-wasting experience, most people decide to make their fresh start *without* the benefit of the telephone."

You might have thought, however, that a telephone would be sadly missed in the present circumstances. But Irini's force of character and organizational abilities, with Nikos as her aide, and Nikos's friends as *his* aide, proved able to cope with surprising despatch. Alice's body was taken to a small room on the ground floor—a bare, cell-like little place, but that seemed right enough.

A doctor arrived—Greek but English-speaking—accompanied by a man who appeared to be the local policeman.

From the doctor it was learned that Alice had died not from drowning, but from a blow or blows on the side of the head. She had been dead before she entered the water.

"Yes," he answered. "Maybe she has fallen. Maybe a big rock has fallen on her. The rocks do fall in this bay. They are loose a bit, do you know. Then she fell in the water. But I do not think she did drown. We shall know more." He paused diplomatically. He means,

Jemima supposed, after the autopsy, but he is too delicate to conjure up such a distressing image.

None of the guests was free to leave the villa until further formalities had taken place.

"He wants our passports, I think, to look at," murmured Sarah, who had taken on the role of translator. "And he wants to know the answer to two questions immediately. He wants to know who is now in charge of this party at the Villa Elia. And he wants to know who's the next-of-kin of the unfortunate lady, as he describes her."

"I can answer both of those questions." William exuded a deep breath. "I am, was, *am*, Alice's lawful husband and next-of-kin. She had not, so far as I know, changed her will, in spite of our separation. So I inherit the villa. I'm still her husband legally."

"Nonsense," Martha James rapped out sharply. "That's absolute nonsense, William. Alice *had* changed her will. I know that for a fact. You won't inherit the villa—and Alice, as you know, had nothing much else to leave."

"And I suppose *you'll* inherit it? Is that what you're trying to say?" William's tone was sarcastic rather than serious.

"Exactly." Martha dragged on her cigarette. "Quite appropriate, don't you think? In view of everything?"

"But how could that be?" cried Fizzy in great agitation. "You? You meant nothing to her. You were just her business partner. You were handling those antiques with her. I know all about it. Nikos was shipping them out for her, with the help of some other friends. She wanted to build it up. She lost a lot of money when *you*—" she looked angrily at William "—let her down. People were always letting her down. But *she* was into helping people—like Nikos, for example!" Fizzy turned back to Martha. "You were just an old friend, down on your luck. She was helping you to make a fresh start."

"An old friend." Martha bent her sardonic gaze on the American girl. Fizzy, alone of them all, had attempted some kind of adjustment of her dress to indicate grief. She was wearing a black scarf. Jemima thought it revealed a tenderness in Fizzy which so far no one else had attempted to exhibit. "An old friend," repeated Martha. "Yes, you could say that."

"I don't want to speak out of turn," Mrs. Vascoe began with the habitual note of apology in her voice, "this is all very distasteful under the circumstances. But perhaps you should know now, as you don't seem to be aware, that Alice and I were partners. We'd gone

into partnership over Fresh Perspectives, the villa, the whole business. I'd been thinking about doing something useful since Harry died, and Alice and I discussed it. She needed the capital. You know about that, Mr. Gearhart."

She gazed firmly round. "If anyone is in control here now, and I don't want to obtrude too much, of course, but I really think it must be—" she paused, as if struggling against the apology trying to return to her voice "—well, me."

"This is not distasteful, as you put it—it's horrible!" burst out Fizzy. "Poor Alice, hardly cold yet." She shuddered. "We don't even know how she died, and we're quarreling over business. Didn't you care for her at all?"

"It must be obvious even to you, Fizzy, that some of us cared for her a great deal," Martha countered.

It was suddenly unbearably hot, and the happy cries from the shore—the tourists had come with the noonday sun—were increasingly intrusive to the tense group on the terrace above.

"How like Alice! Even now we're all quarreling over her. I told you it was a mistake." Surprisingly, this bitter exclamation came from Sarah Halliwell. What was more, she turned to William Gearhart as she said it.

"You mean I shouldn't have come? I had to come. You know that. I had to see you."

Jemima, feeling herself to be the outsider in this increasingly murky discussion, judged it the moment to intervene.

"Shouldn't we all step back from this a little?" she asked in her most reasonable voice, the one she kept in reserve for battling interviewees in her investigative television series. "We've all had a shock—a number of shocks, as a matter of fact. Apparently, this wasn't just a normal Fresh Perspectives house party, to put it mildly. You two, Sarah and William, obviously know each other. Martha was a close and old *friend*"—she emphasized the word deliberately without looking at the painter—"and you, Fizzy, were a newish friend."

Fizzy nodded strongly.

"Mrs. Vascoe, you were her partner—newish partner?"

Mrs. Vascoe inclined her head.

"What is quite obvious to me," went on Jemima, "if rather too late in the day, is that Alice wasn't content for me to make up my own mind about the value or otherwise of Fresh Perspectives. She was sufficiently keen on my using some film of it for television to ensure

that my visit was, in a sense, rigged. Mrs. Vascoe, you would talk about your late husband"—Jemima smiled nicely in her direction. "Fizzy, you would talk about your bad marriage"—another smile, polite, not quite so nice. "Sarah, I'm not sure about you. You mentioned a personal betrayal. Perhaps you really were getting a fresh perspective on things. Yet you clearly know Alice's estranged husband well."

But Sarah Halliwell chose neither to confirm nor deny what Jemima had said.

It was William who burst out, with something of a return to his original intemperate manner, "Of course we know each other. And there was a betrayal, a highly personal betrayal. But the betrayer was Alice, not me. I'd like to make that absolutely clear. Alice used Sarah's knowledge in the gallery, quoted her, got her name involved. When I went up the spout, Sarah lost her job."

"William, do we have to have all this out again? And in public? It's nothing to do with poor Alice's death. She offered me the trip to make up, I suppose. She was generous, she could be generous. And, yes, Jemima, you're right. Alice did ask us all along to make up a convincing party for you, even though our reasons for a fresh start were, speaking for myself, perfectly genuine."

"Nothing to do with Alice's death?" challenged Fizzy. "That's for the police to say, I think. How do we know it was an accident? You were out and about last night, Sarah. I saw you when I took my dip. I saw the light come on in your cottage, saw you moving about. Who's to say you didn't go up to the house, lure Alice down to the shore—"

"I have no intention of denying that I left my cottage last night," Sarah spoke proudly. "As a matter of fact, I visited William's cottage. I reasoned with him. I tried to persuade him to leave in the morning—there was nothing to be gained from being here. The past was the past: there was nothing more either of us could do about it."

"Perfectly right," William said. "Why not add that we spent the night together? That we made love, if you prefer to put it that way. So unless Fizzy is going to accuse us *both* of lying, and *both* of murdering Alice, I think this delightful young woman must really accept—"

"Are you patronizing me?" Fizzy bristled. But the word "murder," mentioned for the first time, cast a new and frightful shadow on all of them.

It was the reemergence of Irini, weeping once more now that there

was temporarily no need for her executive qualities and expostulations—the word Nikos could be heard over and over—which put an end to the whole distressing scene.

"Poor Irini—and, still more, poor Nikos," sighed Sarah. "Nikos is wondering what is going to happen to him, or rather what is going to happen to the business."

Mrs. Vascoe smiled eagerly. "Oh, please do reassure them, Sarah. I wish I knew some Greek, but you must assure them on my behalf that of course the business will go on, of course Irini won't lose her job! Hardly. She's the mainstay. As for Nikos, I'm not quite clear exactly what he does, but whatever arrangement Alice made with him, I'll surely honor that. Harry taught me to have everything very clear from the start, and I certainly mean to get everything clear from now on—"

Sarah was looking at her with some embarrassment; then she raised an eyebrow in William's direction. He nodded.

"Mrs. Vascoe, this is going to be quite awkward, I fear. But the business Irini is worrying about, Nikos's business with Alice, is the one Fizzy mentioned to you—rather too blithely, I'm afraid, under the circumstances. We have reason to believe that Alice was shipping out certain antiquities—specifically, vases—using Nikos."

"Now you listen here—" Fizzy was belligerent once more—"Alice may no longer be here to protect herself, but that's no reason why the whole of this should be dumped on her. What about you, Martha? It was your idea—Alice told me that. There were some odd things going on up at your cottage, I know it. I took a look one day. Jemima, I wanted to talk to you about that last night."

Irini said something very fierce in Greek to Sarah and threw her hands up in the air once more. Then she stalked off back in the direction of the kitchen.

"What did she say, Sarah?" asked Mrs. Vascoe. "I don't know what to think. Is it true?"

"She says she wishes Kiria Alice had never tried to make the Villa Elia into a business, never involved Nikos in business. She says Kiria Alice and Kirie William were happy together once, when they built the villa."

"I was happy. Alice was never really happy. She could never leave anything or anyone alone. No sooner did we build the villa than she saw how it could be used. The gallery, too—that could be used."

On that sad little speech, spoken at last with resignation rather than rage, William turned away and wandered back in the direction

of his cottage. After a moment, Sarah shrugged her shoulders and followed him. It was a signal for the rest to disperse, Fizzy allowing herself one Parthian shot. "When the police start to ask the real questions, there will be some explaining to do."

A long swim must be in order, thought Jemima in the late afternoon. There was no sign of the doctor, nor the local policeman; no kind of official had come near them since the last incursion. Were they all to spend another night together then, under the unhappy umbrella of the stricken villa?

That seemed to be the general plan, or general lack of plan, and there did not appear to be any alternative. To remove oneself to a hotel—supposing one was to be found empty in the high tourist season—might be tactless under the circumstances.

In the afternoon, a grim-faced Irini did reappear. She visited Jemima's cottage and was on her way to the others. Nikos had been up at the police station, but was now back. There was nothing sinister about his presence there, Jemima understood. So far. She did not know what the ramifications of Alice's death would be for Nikos and his friends and their presumably illegal smuggling business. The message Irini brought to her, written in careful English, was that officialdom would return to the Villa Elia tomorrow.

So, another night together. But not dinner together, surely? That would be too much. But, no, Irini was going up to the village. There was nothing for her to do here but mourn. Irini mimed sorrow.

Another note, written in much less good, but still comprehensible English, indicated that Irini's sister would prepare a cold supper and leave it for them all as usual on the terrace. After all, it was up to the individuals concerned to eat it there or carry it away to their separate cottages.

A long swim was definitely in order.

Picking her way carefully along the pretty but stony beach, Jemima avoided the spot where Alice's body had been found. It was marked—by Nikos? by Nikos at Irini's orders? by the police? by Fizzy?—with a little cairn of stones.

Once she was in the sea, Jemima floated out easily into the bay. The water grew deep within a few yards of the shore. The swell was gentle but commanding, the water almost chilly. Even in high summer, the Corfu water, unlike that of the rest of Greece, remained coolish and thus invigorating. Jemima turned on her back and

looked up at the cliffs and headlands, the extensive olive-spattered territories of the Villa Elia. The little cairn remained a marker and a monument which, she had to admit, could not be ignored.

How peaceful and clean everything looked now, washed in the late-afternoon sun! Yet it was this very shore which, last night, and without any knowledge of what was occurring, had seemed to Jemima so abruptly menacing—cries heard, lights perhaps flickering, a boat maybe seen. Had it been her instinct that something evil was afoot? Or a fatal accident—that was, after all, a far more likely explanation. Why had William, and Fizzy, too, seemed to jump to the conclusion that there was something unnatural about what had happened?

Fresh starts, fresh perspectives. Lapped by the water, gazing up at the villa itself (blue shutters now firmly closed against the sun—or tragedy), Jemima began to meditate anew on the so-called theme of the Villa Elia holidays.

Supposing Alice *had* been killed? Presumably, they would know for sure in the morning. Had she been killed to prevent her making a fresh start? Or in revenge by those incapable of making one? Fizzy might come into the first category. Or even Martha, locked in their jealousy of each other. William and Sarah could fall in the second. Mrs. Vascoe, on the other hand, if as innocent as she seemed about Alice's smuggling ventures, had no motive to wish the dead woman ill. But if she was a somewhat deeper character than she appeared—not altogether improbable, since she had surprised them with her news of the partnership—then she might have got hold of some inkling of Alice's business-within-a-business and might not have liked what she found out, the misuse of her money, the misuse of her late Harry's money. Under those circumstances, even meek Betsy Vascoe might find it in her nature to behave less like an apologetic mouse and more like an enraged rat.

Jemima watched as a figure, a woman, walked along the shore and paused by the small cairn, her head bowed. From her outline, so much more substantial than that of the rest of the female guests, Jemima guessed she was looking at Fizzy. She saw the black scarf fluttering round her head. At this distance, Fizzy gave the impression of being both fine and dignified in her mourning.

Fizzy? No, Fizzy could not have desired Alice's death. Fizzy had manifestly hero-worshipped Alice. Jemima remembered the embarrassment of some of Fizzy's enthusiasms and how gracefully Alice had dealt with them—used them, as it now seemed. Surely Fizzy

could never have wished for any harm to come to Alice, her model of all a woman should be—practical, helpful, businesslike.

Martha, then? But how could Martha have desired Alice's death? Martha's words, "My Alice," rang in Jemima's ears. And then Fizzy's further exclamation: "All our pasts are crying out to haunt us!"

The figure of Fizzy, head still bowed, had by now walked away from the cairn on the beach and vanished among the olive trees.

A fresh perspective. Wait. Jemima saw suddenly how you might look at the whole matter from another angle. She began instinctively to swim back for the shore, using her practiced crawl, very different from the reflective way she had been floating and looking up at the villa. Then she realized that there was, in fact, no need to hurry for what she had to do. She swam more slowly, then floated again. Night would fall and, with it, the gentle cloak of warm darkness which would cover all things and make them, at least for the time being, acceptable.

A confession. Jemima thought there had been enough pain already, and enough shame—more pain, if not more shame, might be avoided if certain things were known—confessed—before the officials came to question the guests in the morning.

"You did care for her," she said much later that night, sitting on the terrace of the other person's cottage. "I know that. You cared for her most of all. You had more reason to care. And so you killed her."

"Would you believe me if I told you it was an accident?" The person spoke in a low voice. Both of them looked out to sea. The cottage was in total darkness. There were no lights on in the terrace. Both had preferred it to be that way. "In a way it was an accident. I wanted her to let me go. She was always talking about it, but why wouldn't she let me make a fresh start?"

"But you never could." Jemima spoke gently. "You were the one person who could never make a fresh start while Alice was alive. And perhaps you can't now that she's dead."

"When did you guess?"

"The one bond that can't be broken, ignored, forgotten. That's it, isn't it? That's what kept you as her slave?"

"The bond was—"

"Motherhood. That was it, wasn't it?" Silence fell. "Alice was your daughter, wasn't she? That was the hold she had over you. The hold that meant she would never let you go."

Martha James's cigarette glowed in the darkness. Jemima could see a white heap of stubs in the blue-pottery ashtray at her feet.

"I knew when you knelt by her body. You looked so alike. Even at that moment."

"No fresh start for me," said Martha. "Not while Alice was alive."

"I think you must have fought with her," continued Jemima. "You must have suffered so much: being involved yet again in one of her crooked businesses. She used you—you *had* to be loyal to her. She'd used you, I imagine, over the gallery business, as she'd used William and Sarah Halliwell. As she was now using Fizzy, poor hapless devoted creature, and Mrs. Vascoe. Your reputation had already suffered. Now she was going to use you all over again—restoring, painting up, as Fizzy euphemistically put it."

"I did fight with her," admitted Martha. "I was haunted by those cries. At first I did think it was some kind of ghost, a woman wailing—the woman I had been, if you like, an expression of my conscience. But that night, *last* night, for God's sake, I began to understand a little more of how she operated. Nikos and the boat. Devoted Nikos, so eager to work up his own little business, trusting that she would not get him into trouble. Those cries were Nikos's signal. For the loading, I imagine.

"I heard the cries. I went out. Nikos was leaving in the boat. No wailing woman, but plenty of bad conscience. She had me looking at the vases, restoring all day. Now the results were being shipped off. I should never have indulged her, spoiled her, helped her. William knew that—hence his outburst, which was justified in a sort of ghastly way, I suppose. I was unlucky to her. Alice always wanted something more. With her little angel's face, she could wheedle anyone. Beginning with her mother."

"Beginning, but not ending."

"Not ending. No. Last night I hit her. I'd never done that before, not even when she was a little girl. I didn't believe in it. Ironical, isn't it? But last night she laughed at me—said the only value of my work was to make a little money for her. Laughed at me for thinking the world had lost anything with the failure of Martha James, artist.

"You can't escape me, ever. You're my mother—you're not a painter.' Those were her last words. I slapped her, hard. She fell, then stumbled to her feet. We were on the little path on the edge of the cliff. She fell again, a more serious fall—

"I ran down," Martha went on. "She had fallen all the way to the beach. She was dead. No pulse, nothing. There must be—injuries.

The doctor will tell you about that. Her head hit a rock. I never meant to kill her."

"You were quite sure she was dead?"

"Of course," replied Martha in her spare manner. The emotion had drained from her voice. They might have been discussing the fishing-boats, the stars, or the night breeze. "She was dead. And so I floated her body out to sea. I was mad. I had killed the person I loved, and so I let her float away in the water. The cleansing water."

"But she floated back." Jemima kept her voice equally lacking in emotion.

"She came back to me. Yet again. There was to be no escape, as she had told me, no fresh start for *me*. I'll tell them all this in the morning, of course. The others will know, too. They'll recover. Fizzy will find someone else to hero-worship. William and Sarah have each other. Mrs. Vascoe will find something more truly useful to do.

"But for me—" Martha stared out in the darkness as though she could still see her daughter's body floating on the edge of the sea "—there isn't any escape from Alice, ever."

Jemima put out her hand and gently touched the older woman's thin brown arm. She thought that what Martha had said was probably true: for this particular mother, there could never be a real escape.

Aloud, all she said was, "You didn't really want that, Martha, did you? Up to the end, you wanted to protect her. She was your little girl."



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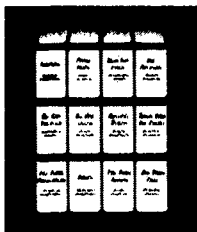
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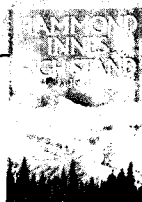
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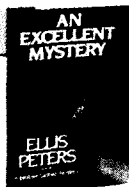
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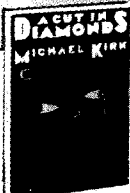
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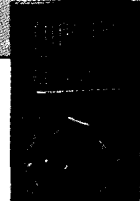
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